

The Making of *Minḥat Qena'ot*:  
The Controversy over Ideational Transgression in Fourteenth-Century Jewish Occitania

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## ABSTRACT

The Jewish communities of Occitania, known by medieval Jews as “Provence,” were involved in the repeated outbreaks of public controversy over the integration of Greco-Islamic philosophy into Jewish intellectual culture and, due to its halakhic implications, into Jewish practice and society. By the time of the early fourteenth-century controversy, Maimonideanism was a dominant cultural movement in the Mediterranean communities and Occitania in particular. Its critics, led by Abba-Mari b. Moses ha-Yarḥi (fl. c. 1300) in Montpellier and Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Adret (Rashba, c. 1235-c. 1310) in Barcelona, were concerned not with the value of *ḥokhmot ḥizoniyyot*, “external wisdom,” but with the potential for what I term ideational transgression, denoting halakhic transgression deriving from a matter of conscience or ideology.

This dissertation explores the motivations of Occitan proponents of a ban against the underage study of philosophy, and their approach to curtailing the activities they viewed as harmful. Ban proponents worried that rationalism would lead young people to reject the theoretical framework of Jewish law and thus, fail to observe it. Rather than developing ideational transgression as a halakhic category, an approach similar to that undertaken by Maimonides, ban proponents instead chose to regulate access to philosophy by means of excommunication. Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim of Perpignan (c. 1245-c. 1315), who popularized philosophy in encyclopedic compendia and in public teaching, serves as a test case for this approach. As the only person accused by name of ideational transgression during the course of the controversy, it is significant that social forces rather than legal proceedings were used to compel Levi to curtail his activities. Moreover, I argue that the moderate center of the intellectual and social elite was artificially

polarized by the proposed ban, despite their genuine concern about the radical implications of rationalism; this legislative approach was ultimately ineffective due to its nonsystematic nature. My examination is undertaken through a careful study of the letter collection *Minḥat Qena'ot*, which permits an unusually clear window into the understudied community of Occitania just as it reached a critical turning point in its conceptualization of Judaism, which reverberated throughout the Jewish world.

This work is dedicated to my grandparents, z"l, who first taught me the significance of history:

Sarah Lerner Aharon

Miriam Fuchs Levi

Yacov Levi

Itzhak Ron

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For all my deep interest in the past, it is in the present that I have found the most abundant joys, here with my family. My husband Jeff, an inveterate history enthusiast, has pondered with me, endured countless impromptu lectures, occupied children while I worked, and learned to make an excellent espresso. And he has done it all with his signature warmth and humor. My parents, Yacov and Nomi Ron, so thoroughly surrounded me with the grand adventure

of intellectual life that it never occurred to me that I wouldn't try to be part of the conversation. I believe it never occurred to them either, and if anyone could be more enthusiastic about my project and the life of scholarship I have chosen than me, it is they. My sister, Ayala Ron, has been from the beginning my soul companion, the kind who, in her quiet and giving way, does not realize just how necessary and important her support is. She and my mother provided me with many hours of childcare in which to work, without which my dissertation would not have been written. And this, of course, brings me to my children, Nathan, Ronen, and Daniel, who make the past into the future, and the present the best time of all. May they know the pleasure of studying a subject deeply and with fascination, as I have been privileged to do. Even more than that, it is my hope that my work will demonstrate for them the importance of their own history, so that that they may ever know who they are and where they come from.



## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the fourteenth century, the Jewish communities of Occitania, known by medieval Jews as “Provence,” sat astride a fault line.<sup>1</sup> This fissure had long run through these communities, which geographically, socially, and culturally straddled the old, prosperous Jewish center in Iberia (“Sefarad”) and the newer, thriving communities of northwestern Europe (“Ashkenaz-Zarfat”). Over the course of the thirteenth century, Occitan Jews, initially dominated culturally by intellectual traditions from the north, came increasingly under the influence of the Judeo-Arabic synthesis emanating from Iberia. This gradual, but profound, shift created an inherent divide within Occitan Jewish culture. Occitans had to accommodate not only new

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, I render Hebrew and vernacular names and terms in their common Anglicized forms insofar as such forms exist (e.g., Moses and Joseph as opposed to Mosheh and Yosef, John I as opposed to Joan I, Ecclesiastes as opposed to Qohelet), and transliterate where such forms do not exist (e.g., Menaḥem, Makhir, Astruc, Bava’ Qama’). Certain uncommon Hebrew names I have chosen to transliterate even where a rarely-used Anglicized version exists (e.g. Pinḥas as opposed to Phineas). Where *ben*, “son of,” occurs in a true patronymic, I have abbreviated it “b.”; conversely, where *ibn* occurs as an element of a true surname and *not* as an element in a patronymic, it is rendered in the upper case as “Ibn” (e.g., Joseph b. Abba-Mari Ibn Kaspi). Vernacular names are given by their most common variant for the given individual, and place-names that have become ossified as surnames are given in the vernacular, as opposed to phrases designating actual place of residence, which are given in English (e.g., Shelemiah de Lunel of Montpellier). Where a surname based on origin is strictly referred to in the sources in Hebraized form, I have preserved the usage (e.g., Todros de Bilqieri as opposed to Todros de Beaucaire). Place names are given in their most commonly-known form (e.g. French Beaucaire rather than Occitan Belcaire). Where logically possible, I strive to refer to a given individual by their given first name or true surname as opposed to their Hebrew acronym or Latinized name (e.g., Ibn Adret rather than the Rashba), with the exception of Maimonides.

A brief note on transliteration: Hebrew characters are reserved for the footnotes, while Hebrew within the body text is rendered in Latin characters. Consonantal ם is rendered as *y*, whereas ן is always indicated as *’* whether consonant or vowel. Final ן (and Arabic ٔ) is indicated *-h*. While no distinction is made between ן/ח, ב/ו, and ס/ש, ף is rendered *q*, כ as *k*, כּ as *kh*, פ as *f*, and ף as *h*; doubled consonants are indicated. Short and long vowels are not indicated. The few transliterated Arabic words that occur follow the conventions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., edited by Kate Fleet *et al.*, 12 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), with the aforementioned exception of ٔ; plurals of Arabic words are Anglicized. While idiosyncratic, this method appears to me a sensible line between scientific transliteration, academic convention, and common usage.

methodology for interpreting scriptural texts—and the laws that arose out of them—but also an alternate way of discerning truth itself, the rational method of Greco-Islamic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> They also had to assimilate new cultural attitudes that bore the imprint of Islamic practices and traditions into their own, which bore a greater kinship with the mores of Ashkenaz. This distinct situation created a fertile ground for innovation, as well as for controversy.

The controversy of the early fourteenth century—which was debated through letters, in synagogues on Shabbat afternoons, in study halls, and in the homes of the ruling elite in a number of Occitan and Iberian cities—was not the first public discussion of the fault lines undergirding Occitan society, and medieval Jewish culture writ large. However, it is the most well documented, the controversy about which we possess the most knowledge from contemporary sources. Specifically, it is documented in a unique, lengthy compilation of letters entitled *Minḥat Qen'aot* and edited by Abba-Mari b. Moses b. Joseph ha-Yarḥi (Astruc de Lunel, fl. c. 1300), the instigator of the debate and the chief correspondent between Montpellier and Barcelona, seat of perhaps the most renowned rabbinic authority of the age and Abba-Mari's most important supporter, Solomon

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<sup>2</sup> To a significant degree, if lesser in scope, this acculturation of Ashkenazi methodology occurred also within the Iberian communities during this period, partly as a result of political turmoil in the Germanic regions which served as impetus for the migration of Jews from the north to other centers. However, due to the size and prominence of the Iberian community, such acculturation served as a change in direction without being a paradigm shift, as in Occitania. See, *inter alia*, Avraham Grossman, "Relations between Spanish and Ashkenazic Jewry in the Middle Ages," in *The Sephardi Legacy*, edited by Haim Beinart, 220–239 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992); Hirsch Jakob Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences, and Problems As Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Judah D. Galinsky, "Ashkenazim in Sefarad: The Rosh and the Tur on the Codification of Jewish Law," *Jewish Law Annual* 16 (2006): 3–23; and Eric Lawee, "From Sepharad to Ashkenaz: A Case Study in the Rashi Supercommentary Tradition," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (2006): 393–425.

b. Abraham Ibn Adret (Rashba, c. 1235-c. 1310).<sup>3</sup> The 1304-1306 controversy is also the only discussion to generate a legislative solution to the cultural problem. Poised as it was on the cusp of the expulsions from French lands (including territories in the region held by other rulers), it is acutely connected to the reconstitution of Occitan culture on new soil.

In terms of its content, this controversy is distinguished by its paradoxical moderation: it never sought to eradicate *ḥokhmot ḥizoniyyot*, “external wisdom,” from the curriculum but merely to limit access to them. Nor was this a debate about the value of Maimonideanism, by then the dominant cultural movement in Jewish Occitania, as were the controversies of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the fourteenth-century controversy was about the implications of Maimonideanism, about the worst of its potential logical conclusions. How does one rationalize the a priori nature of *mizvot* (commandments), and particularly the *ḥuqqim*, the category of *mizvot* characterized by their irrationality? Does one continue to lay *tefillin*? How should the community address one who does not? Would such a person obey the *beit din* (court of law)? These questions were poorly articulated, as we shall see, and went largely unanswered; instead, an attempt was made to obviate these unnamed logical conclusions in the form of a ban against the underage study of

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<sup>3</sup> *Minḥat Qena’ot* was printed in two editions in the modern era, once in Pressburg in 1838 and again in Jerusalem in 1991, edited by H. Z. Dimitrovsky. (The Pressburg text has been reprinted in whole or in part several times.) These two printed texts are discussed below in the Introduction. Both editions are referenced in the scholarly literature, so I have chosen to key page references to both. The Pressburg edition is abbreviated MQp, and the Dimitrovsky edition MQd. References are given as *edition, chapter, page number* and, for MQd, *line numbers*. Unless otherwise noted, my translation follows Dimitrovsky’s critical text.

<sup>4</sup> On Maimonideanism, see James T. Robinson, “We Drink Only from the Master’s Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200-1306,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40, “Epigonism and the Dynamic of Jewish Culture,” edited by Shlomo Berger and Irene E. Zweip (2007-2008): 27-60; and “Preface,” in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, edited by *idem*. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vii-xii.

non-Jewish philosophy. Even this was a moderate response, and one which was to go untested in the entirety of the medieval period.

I have chosen the term “ideational transgression,” as opposed to heresy, to express the nexus of theology and praxis that, I will argue, is the subject addressed by the ban proposal. “Transgression,” indicating an active, as opposed to cognitive or intellectual, violation; and describing that transgression, “ideational,” indicating that the act derives directly from a particular idea. The term thereby reflects the root of the ban proponents’ anxiety, namely the potential for falsehoods in governing people’s actions. While merely believing in the verity of an incorrect doctrine does not render one a transgressor within the framework of Jewish law, there is the constant danger that such ideation may lead its believer to antinomian behavior; in turn, ideational transgression on a wide scale threatens the community as a whole: its ritual life, its governance and civil institutions, and its educational institutions, all of which rely upon adherence to the unarticulated theory of the legitimacy of the halakhah and the halakhic process.

#### JEWISH OCCITANIA AT THE TIME OF THE CONTROVERSY

The Maimonidean controversy of 1304-1306 emerged from the distinct situation of the Occitan Jewish communities in response to profound contemporary socio-intellectual problems, many of which derive from the specific features of a regional culture in rapid transition. This region, roughly consisting of the southern third of modern-day France—the broad swathe of land stretching from the Pyrenees to the Alps—maps poorly onto modern conceptions of state and nationality; too often the borders of contemporary France or Spain have been retrojected onto a

complex medieval political reality.<sup>5</sup> It also fits poorly within the aforementioned Ashkenaz-Sefarad paradigm that has long dominated Jewish traditional thinking and the field of Jewish Studies, causing the culture of this southern French region to be understood as a subculture of the two dominant arenas.

To address these complexities, I have chosen to term the region “Occitania,” as a reflection of the significance of cultural rather than political boundaries in its self-definition.<sup>6</sup> This term signifies that the region was primarily defined by, and identified with, the language spoken by its inhabitants. The Jews of the region, like their neighbors, spoke romance vernaculars in which *òc*, from the Latin demonstrative pronoun *hoc*, indicated “yes.” It is in Dante degli Alighieri (c. 1265–1321)’s linguistic treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* that this language group is so identified;<sup>7</sup> the Occitans themselves tended to call Dante’s *langue d’oc* simply *romans* or *lenga romana*.<sup>8</sup> Medieval Jews, both inhabitants of this region and those addressing its inhabitants, most frequently refer to the region generically as *ha-’arez* (“the land”) or *’arezekhem* (“your land”), and as *’erez Provinza*—

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<sup>5</sup> See Bernd Schneidmüller, “Constructing Identities of Medieval France,” in *France in the Central Middle Ages*, edited by Marcus Bull, 15–42 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> An additional benefit is that “Occitania” is also a term used in the study of the region by historians of Christian Europe, promoting interdisciplinary conversation.

<sup>7</sup> This is in contradistinction to those romance vernaculars that adopted instead *hoc illud*, contracted as *oil*, or *sic*, contracted as *sì*, for “yes”; *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, 1.8.5; in Steven Botterill’s recent edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 1996), the passage is on p. 16 with English translation on p. 17. Incidentally, it appears that Dante wrote *De Vulgari Eloquentia* at precisely the time of the fourteenth-century Maimonidean controversy: for an assessment of its dating, see Zygmunt G. Baranski, “Dante’s Biblical Linguistics,” in *Dante: The Critical Complex*, edited by Richard H. Lansing, 261–299 (New York: Routledge, 2003; reprinted from *Lectura Dantis* 5 (1989): 105–143), 282.

<sup>8</sup> Frede Jensen, “Language,” in F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis, eds., *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, 349–399 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 349.

that is, “Provence.”<sup>9</sup> Because of the latter term, the Jewish community of the region is most frequently referred to, within the traditional as well as scholarly literature, as Provence. This is a confusing term due to the limited geographic scope of present-day Provence, which lies east of the Rhône River, whereas the heartland of medieval Jewish Occitania lay in the center corridor of Narbonne-Lunel-Béziers. Alternate terms that have come into scholarly usage include “Languedoc” and “the Midi”; despite their descriptive aim, akin to that of “Occitania,” they, like “Provence,” have the drawback of being names of contemporary French administrative regions. In addition to the confusion caused by the use of imprecise geographic terminology, the vagueness of “Provence” glosses over a political reality that shaped the lives of those who experienced it. Unlike medieval regions ruled efficaciously by a single power, be it a crown or a duchy, Occitania was, even in the precarious medieval political landscape, particularly jumbled and mutable. As such, any cohesion the region might have was necessarily based not on political ties but on cultural ones.

It is not language and literary tradition alone that defined the Occitans, of course; and in the case of Occitan Jews, a long presence in the region appears to have resulted in the development

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<sup>9</sup> *Inter alia*, for *ba-’arez*, see Abba Mari, MQp 75, p. 143 / MQd 95, p. 706, l. 1. For *’erez Provinzia*, see Shelemiah de Lunel, MQd 52.1, p. 472, ll. 31-32 [text absent in MQp]; Abba-Mari, MQp 73, p. 142 / MQd 92, p. 702, l. 21; and Mordecai b. Isaac of Carpentras, MQp 91 / MQd 111, p. , l. For *’arzekhem*, see Ibn Adret’s letters, MQp 3, p. 23 / MQd 21, p. 281, l. 9; MQp 25, p. 69 / MQd 44, p. 442, ll. 19-20; MQp 27, p. 76 / MQd 46, p. 452, l. 60. There are numerous spelling variants of the Hebraized “Provence,” common ones being פְּרוֹבִּינְצָה, פְּרוֹבִּינְצָה, פְּרוֹבִּינְצָה. See Heinrich Gross, *Gallia Judaica: dictionnaire géographique de la France d’après les sources rabbiniques* (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897; reprint, with supplementary material by Simon Schwartzfuchs, Philo Press, 1969), 489-493. The term *Provinza* among Jews is likely an indication of the antiquity of the community there, originating with the Roman province known variously as Gallia Transalpina, Gallia Narbonensis, Provincia Romana, or Provincia Nostra. See Shlomo Pick, “The Jewish Communities of Provence,” Ph.D. diss. (Bar-Ilan University, 1996), 20-28. Note also the colophon to the *Minḥat Qena’ot* manuscript Ms. héb. 970, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (7), in which the copyist refers to the Abba-Mari’s vernacular name, Don Astruc de Lunel, as the name by which he is known “in the country” (בְּמִדְיָה). This may indicate that the note’s author was himself a displaced Occitan. For more on this manuscript, see below.

of a culture distinct in several ways. First, in the realm of halakhic decision and ritual life, Occitan figures were recognized throughout the Jewish world as authorities as well as decisors within a well-defined jurisdiction. This was especially true of the leaders of the old centers of Lunel and Narbonne. Pride in the authority of local custom with respect to halakhic decision was expressed in the celebrated Occitan activity of recording and defending *minbag Provinza*.<sup>10</sup> Second, Occitan Jewry would prove to be an unusually lucrative market for Hebrew translations of philosophical and medical texts. Among the romance-speaking Jewries of Christian Europe, the Occitan appetite for rationalism was the predominant impetus for the transmission of these texts from their Judeo-Arabic setting and, later, for the production of original treatises and commentaries. Third, a focus on the genres of 'aggadic commentary, legal codes and compilations, customaries, *hassagot*, philosophical Bible commentaries, mystical treatises, and translation is characteristic of Occitan Jewish culture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Works describing and defending the *minbag* of the Occitan communities include Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi (c. 1155–1215)'s *Minbag 'Olam*, also called *Sefer ha-Manbig* (c. late twelfth century); Asher b. Saul (late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries)'s *Sefer ha-Minhagot*; and Menahem ha-Me'iri (Don Vidal Solomon, 1249–1316)'s *Magen 'Avot*. To a certain extent, Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel's *'Orhot Hayyim*, and its popular version known as *Kol Bo* (late thirteenth to early fourteenth century), can also be included here, along with Abraham b. Isaac (Ra'avi Abad; c. 1110–1179)'s *Sefer ha-'Eshkol* (twelfth century). See also Herman Pollack, "An Historical Explanation of the Origin and Development of Jewish Books of Customs (*Sifre Minhagim*): 1100–1300," *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 3/4 (1987): 195–216; and Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 151–152.

<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps significant the early Qabbalah utilizes several of these genres, including scriptural and 'aggadic commentary. While few works of Qabbalah were produced in Occitania proper—most of the Occitan mystical tradition being preserved south of the Pyrenees by circles in Gerona—the prominence of theosophical qabbalah in Occitania makes it worthy of mention here. See, *inter alia*, Marc Sendor, "The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind's Commentary on Sefer Yezirah," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1994; Joseph Dan, *חוגי המקובלים הראשונים* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1983); and Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain," *Mediterranean Historical Review* (1994): 5–19.



These areas of excellence, while overlapping, represent two distinct phases of the development of Occitan Jewish culture: the earlier, talmudocentric period, c. 1100 to 1200, and the later, rationalistic period, c. 1200 to 1400.<sup>12</sup> The talmudocentric period, predating the arrival of Sefardi émigrés fleeing political upheaval in southern Iberia, was dominated by Ashkenazi modes of study. In large part, this was because the fruits of al-Andalus were secreted away by the unintelligibility of Arabic (most translations into Hebrew would not arrive until the following century), while the achievements of the Rhineland masters and Zarfati toṣafists were accessible to the Occitans. Another primary cause of Ashkenazi domination, however, was the common wellspring from which the Occitans drew along with their coreligionists to the north. Like Jews throughout Europe, Occitan Jews in this period looked to the classical locus of authority, the

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<sup>12</sup> Like so much of European Jewish life in the early medieval period, the history of Jewish Occitania in the centuries between the crumbling of the Roman Empire and the reinstitution of urban centers (c. 400–1000) remains largely unattested by documentary, or even material, evidence. The origin of this first Occitan community, it may be surmised, is in the dispersal of Jews among the provinces of the late Roman Empire: see Gross, *Gallia Judaica*, 487–493; Pick, *Communities*, 1; M. Stern, “The Period of the Second Temple,” in *A History of the Jewish People*, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 278; and Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x. The first attestations of Jewish presence in Occitania date from the period of Visigothic rule, occurring in Latin texts of the fifth century. When, in the mid-sixth century, the Visigoths’ seat of power moved from Toulouse to Toledo, Occitania became attractive to Iberian Jews fleeing various Visigothic persecutions; after the Arab conquest of Iberia in 711, another wave of Jews came (Avraham Grossman, “Relations between Spanish and Ashkenazic Jewry in the Middle Ages,” in *The Sephardi Legacy*, edited by Haim Beinart, 220–239 [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992], 221). It is in the following Carolingian period that one of the most significant Jewish collective memories is set, that of the establishment of the *nesi’ut* of Narbonne by Charlemagne—although properly speaking, this legend belongs not to the Carolingian era, but to a much later period of Occitan regional consciousness: see below, chapter 1. A reliable Carolingian source regarding Occitan Jewry is to be found in the writing of Agobard, the archbishop of Lyons from 814 to 840 (*Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia, Opusculum XI*, edited by L. Van Acker [Turnholt: Brepols, 1981], 191–195). In a process that remains unclear, Jews from the Italian peninsula began migrating north around the mid-tenth century, some settling, it appears, in Occitania (Ezra Fleischer, *שירת הקודש העברית בימי הביניים* [Jerusalem: Keter, 1975], 430). It is from this point that the community becomes well attested, although clearly built on the foundations of a long and significant presence in the region.



Babylonian academies, for guidance on matters of halakhah. Occitan Jews are known to have corresponded with the venerable eastern academies.<sup>13</sup> Abraham b. David of Posquières (Ra'avad, c. 1125–c. 1198), who lived concurrently with the effective dissolution of the Babylonian ga'onate, nevertheless cited with deference the opinions of its immediate successors in northern Africa.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Jews of Iberia, however, whose ties to the ga'onic institutions would be strengthened through their “membership” in the Islamic empire,<sup>15</sup> the Jews of Occitania were subject to subsequent influences from the Land of Israel, notably with the migration of the Qalonymos family from Italy, whose members rose to prominence in Ashkenaz and Occitania alike.<sup>16</sup> Political, linguistic, and geographical exigencies engendered close contact between Franco-German and Occitan communities.

The characteristic Occitan manner of “surnaming” becomes prevalent during this period, serving as an expression of regional identification. The custom, which was to prevail into the fourteenth century, was to translate—not merely to transliterate—one’s place of origin into Hebrew. Thus Lunel, meaning moon (*lune*), became Yare’ah, and an Abraham from Lunel would be known as Abraham ha-Yarḥi. While the practice of transliterating place names (e.g., “of Seville”

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob Mann, “The Responsa of the Babylonian Geonim as a Source of Jewish History,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 7, no. 4 (1917): 462; 10, no. 2/3 (1919): 310.

<sup>14</sup> Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 228.

<sup>15</sup> The growth of cities in northern Africa, the Maghrib, and Iberia would also threaten the jurisdiction and authority of the Bavli yeshivot—as dramatized by Ibn Daud—but the methods of study developed in al-Andalus would nevertheless evolve from the background of the Bavli tradition.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that evidence regarding the ties of the Occitan Qalonymoses to those of northern Europe is, like so much data from the period, inconclusive, as Jacob Dey points out (“Qalonymos,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik [Detroit: Macmillan, 2007], 11:749).

rendered as ha-Ishvili), or that of translating private names (e.g., Ḥayyim rendered as Vidal—or perhaps Vidal rendered as Ḥayyim), was customary throughout the medieval Jewish world, the translation of a place name strongly suggests that a person is identified in some way with the Occitan community. An excellent example of this phenomenon is Samuel b. Jacob Ibn Jamʿ (fl. twelfth century), a scholar from Gabès in northern Africa who is best known for authoring a supplement to the talmudic lexicon *ba-ʿArukh* by Nathan b. Yehiʿel of Rome (1035–c. 1110), and for his correspondence with Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164). Samuel lived in Narbonne for a time, which is reflected in his works: he frequently cited Occitan authorities, and is cited by Isaac b. Abba-Mari of Marseilles (c. 1120–c. 1190) in his halakhic compendium *Sefer ha-ʿIttur*.<sup>17</sup> Though steeped in the gaʻonic halakhic legacy dominant in northern Africa—Samuel preserves traditions from the Babylonian centers that are otherwise unknown—he chose for himself the name ʾAgur, a translation of the Arabic *jamʿ* (collection, gathering). In so doing, Samuel identified himself with Occitan talmudism. Famous example of Occitans who are known by their translated place-names include the natives Joseph b. Abba-Mari Ibn Kaspi (c. 1279–c. 1340), “Kaspi” being a translation of “of Argentièrre,” “silver,” and Isaac b. Abraham ha-Gorni (fl. thirteenth century), “Gorni” translating Aire, “threshing floor”; as well as the transplant David b. Samuel Kokhavi of Avignon (fl. c. 1300), whose family presumably originated in the town of Estella in Navarre.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Israel Ta-Shma, “Jama, Samuel Ibn,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 11:7; Norman Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization* (New York: Routledge), 317; and Jacob Mann, “Addenda to ‘The Responsa of the Babylonian Geonim as a Source of Jewish History’ (JQR, n.s., Vols. VII–X),” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 11, no. 4 (1921): 448.

<sup>18</sup> This naming practice was far from universal among Occitans, many having transliterated, symbolic, or honorific surnames if a surname was used at all. However, the presence of a translated place-name surname seems to indicate Occitan origin among medieval Jews.

The second, later cultural development of Occitan Jewry is characterized by increased integration of rationalistic ideas with traditional subjects and methodologies. It was in this period that political conditions in Iberia impelled several waves of immigration into Occitania, bringing with them capable Arabic speakers who were available to translate Judeo-Arabic culture for an increasingly hungry audience. Most famous among them were the Qimḥi and Ibn Tibbon families, though many individuals participated in the translation movement, which anticipated and later facilitated the movement of Greco-Islamic knowledge into Christian Europe.<sup>19</sup> The Arabic works of Judah ha-Levi (c. 1085–1141), Bahye b. Joseph Ibn Pequdah (second half of the eleventh century), Moses b. Maimon (Rambam, Maimonides, c. 1138–1204), and many others were made available to

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<sup>19</sup> On translation from Arabic to Hebrew, see, *inter alia*, Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebraeischen uebersetzungen des mittellalters und die Juden als dolmetscher*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen bureaux, 1893); Alfred L. Ivry, “Philosophical Translations from the Arabic into Hebrew during the Middle Ages,” in *Rencontres de Cultures dans la Philosophie Médiévale: Traductions et traducteurs de l’antiquité tardive au XIVe siècle*, edited by J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (Louvain-la-Neuve/Cassino, 1990); and Steven Harvey, “Arabic into Hebrew: The Hebrew Translation Movement and the Influence of Averroes Upon Medieval Jewish Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 258–280 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the Qimḥis’ translations, see Frank Talmage, “David Kimhi and the Rationalist Tradition,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 38 (1968): 213–235; *idem.*, “David Kimhi and the Rationalist Tradition II: Literary Sources,” in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev*, edited by C. Berlin (New York: Ktav, 1972); and *idem.*, *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). On the Tibbonides’ translations, see James T. Robinson, “The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval ‘Provence,’” In *Be’erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 193–224 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Carlos Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalālat al-Ḥā’irīn into the Moreh ha-Nevukim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007); and Steven Harvey, “Did Maimonides’ Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine which Philosophers would be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992): 51–70.

Occitan Jews, who responded by writing their own Iberian-influenced commentaries, poetry, and treatises. These valued skills were integrated into the education of young men.<sup>20</sup>

The unusual eagerness with which Occitan Jews received Judeo-Arabic culture points to the increased need for finding renewed meaning in traditional texts, meaning that would speak to the changing conditions of European Jewry in the thirteenth century. With the Islamic world in decline and Christian states emerging in the West, the church ascendant and possessed of a new, powerful narrative that overturned earlier and more tolerant attitudes towards non-Christians, Occitans found themselves living in a world quite different from those of Gershom b. Judah (Rabbenu Gershom “Me’or ha-Golah,” c. 960–1028), and Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi, c. 1040–1105), Isaac b. Jacob al-Fasi (Rif, 1013–1103), and Abraham Ibn Ezra.<sup>21</sup> Rationalism was a means of

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<sup>20</sup> On the contemporaneous translation program in the Latin West, see Charles Burnett, “The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Programme in Toledo in the Twelfth Century,” *Science in Context* 14 (2001): 249–288 and “A Group of Arabic-Latin Translators Working in Northern Spain in the Mid-Twelfth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1977): 62–108; Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, “Translations and Translators,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, 421–462 (Oxford, 1982); and Michèle Goyens, Pieter De Leemans, and An Smets, eds., *Science Translated: Latin and Vernacular Translations of Scientific Treatises in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009). On the connection between Hebrew and Latin translations of Arabic works, see Ram Ben-Shalom, “The Tibbonides’ Heritage and Christian Culture: Provence, c.1186 – c.1470,” in *Des Tibbonides à Maïmonide: Rayonnement des Juifs andalous en Pays d’Oc*, edited by Danièle Iancu-Agou (Paris: Cerf, 2009); and Norman Roth, “Jewish Translators at the Court of Alfonso X,” *Thought* 60 (1985): 439–455.

<sup>21</sup> On the various transformations of Jewish society in thirteenth century, see, *inter alia*, Bernard Septimus, “Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, edited by Isadore Twersky, 196–230 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979) and *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213–1327* (London and Portland, Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997); Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); Haym Soloveitchik, “Catastrophe and Halakhic Creativity: Ashkenaz, 1096, 1242, 1306 and 1298,” *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (1998): 71–85; Joseph Dan, “Jewish Thought in the Thirteenth Century: An Introduction,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, edited by S. O. Heller and Moshe Idel (Jerusalem: Magnes,

extracting new and relevant meaning from scripture, as was its contemporaneous response, another Occitan innovation, Qabbalah.

Both the proximate era of rationalistic integration and the earlier era of talmudic authorities, or perhaps better, the interaction between the predominate texts and methodologies of these two dominant curricula, shaped the 1304-1306 controversy. The prevalence of philosophical study in Occitania c. 1400 made questioning rationalism countercultural, while rationalism's relative novelty in the region (as opposed to Iberia) and its deliberate translation emphasized its foreignness. The integrity of the region and its *minhag* meant a firestorm awaiting those who would question it or seek to interfere, while its ties to Iberia and the great influence of its southern neighbor made it a source of support for such questioners.

Despite its integrity and significance, Occitan Jewry has not received much scholarly attention as a cultural entity. The Jews of the region are generally subsumed into the history of France, or perhaps of Ashkenazi halakhic development or Iberian rationalism. There is no

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1989); Marc Saperstein, "The Social and Cultural Context: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 294-330 (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Schmuel Trigano, "The Conventionalization of Social Boundaries and the Strategies of Jewish Society in the Thirteenth Century," in *New Horizons in Sephardic Studies*, edited by Yedida K. Stillman and George K. Zucker, 45-66 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). On the change in Christian attitudes towards Jews during the thirteenth century, see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: A Study in the Development of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and the Jewish Response* (Berkeley, 1989); Kenneth Stow, "Papal and Royal Attitudes Toward Jewish Lending in the Thirteenth Century," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 6 (1981): 161-184; and Robert I. Burns, "Christian-Islamic Confrontation in the West: The Thirteenth-Century Dream of Conversion," *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 1386-1434.

monograph devoted to the Jews of Occitania during the entirety of the middle ages.<sup>22</sup> Even Gustave Saige's slim 1881 monograph, one of the few treatments of Occitan Jewry written by a single scholar, only goes up to the early fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Saige's work, with its helpful synthesis and lengthy appendix of Latin sources, has continued to provide the basis for study of the region, alongside Pierre Vidal's lengthy series published in the 1887-1888 *Revue des études juives*.<sup>24</sup> More recent treatments tend to be edited volumes encompassing many aspects of Occitan Jewish life, though not within a synthetic narrative; among these are Marie-Humbert Vicaire and Bernhard Blumenkrantz's important collection *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc, XIIe siècle - début XIVe siècle*<sup>25</sup> and Carol Iancu's *Les Juifs à Montpellier et dans le Languedoc à travers l'Histoire du Moyen Age à nos jours*.<sup>26</sup> A more recent source collection for the region is Abraham Sofer (Schreiber)'s *Teshuvot Hakhmei Provinzia*, which concentrates on the earlier, Ashkenazi-dominated period of Occitan Jewish Culture.<sup>27</sup> Ben-Zion Benedikt's *The Center of Torah Study in Provence* provides an excellent

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<sup>22</sup> It bears notice that, unlike so much of the medieval scholarship on Christian Europe produced by French scholars, many French works on the Jews of Occitania have remained untranslated into English and sometimes overlooked for this reason. In contrast, the works of Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, Jacques Le Goff, and Georges Duby are mainstays of medieval European history. If Occitania is infrequently identified as their subject by French historians, it is because the Albigensian Crusade and Bernard of Gui have been entered irrevocably into the annals of "French" and even "European" medieval history. Thus, while Occitania has arguably become one of the broad bases of the narrative of "European" medieval history—if under the name "France"—Occitan Jewry has had no such luck.

<sup>23</sup> *Les Juifs du Languedoc antérieurement au quatorzième siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1881; Reprint, Farnborough: Gregg, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> "Les Juifs dans les anciens comtés de Roussillon et Cerdagne (I)," *Revue des études juives* 15 (1887): 19-55; "Les Juifs dans les anciens comtés de Roussillon et Cerdagne (II)," *Revue des études juives* 16 (1888): 1-23, 170-203.

<sup>25</sup> Published in Toulouse by Privat, Édouard, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Published in Montpellier by the Centre de Recherches et d'Études Juives et Hébraïques, 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Sofer (Schreiber), ed., להרב אב"ד ולהאב"ד, תשובות חכמי פרובינציה: ביניהן תשובות לגאוני בבל, להרב אב"ד ולהאב"ד (Jerusalem, 1967).

history of the earlier cultural period,<sup>28</sup> while Joseph Shatzmiller has updated Gross's *Gallia Judaica* and contributed much to the history of Occitan medicine and rationalist culture.<sup>29</sup> Simon Schwartzfuchs, while tending to write Occitania into the narrative of "French" Jewry in his monographs, has devoted a few articles to Occitania proper.<sup>30</sup> Sophia Menache, whose works on communication in the medieval world are of great interest to this study, has also written on the political aspects of Occitan life.<sup>31</sup> Shlomo H. Pick's 1996 dissertation, "The Jewish Communities of Provence before the Expulsion in 1306," provides a socio-historical analysis of Occitan Jewry, again

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<sup>28</sup> *The Center of Torah Study in Provence* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> On Gross, see "Suggestions and Addenda to *Gallia Judaica*" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 45 (1970): 607-610. Shatzmiller's writings on Occitania in general include "Gersonides and the Jewish Community of Orange in his Day" [Hebrew], in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, edited by Bustenay Oded, Zvi Avneri, Akiba Gilboa and Uriel Rappaport, 111-126 (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1972), and "Some Further Information About Gersonides and the Orange Jewish Community in his Day" [Hebrew], in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, edited by Bustenay Oded, Zvi Avneri, Akiba Gilboa and Uriel Rappaport, 139-143 (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1974); "L'Inquisition et les Juifs de Provence au XIIIe siècle" *Provence historique* 93-94 (1973): 327-338; *Recherches sur la communauté juive de Manosque au moyen âge, 1241-1329* (Paris: Mouton, 1973); and "Converts and Judaizers in the Early Fourteenth Century," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 63-77. Shatzmiller's works on medicine in Occitania include "Notes sur les médecins Juifs en Provence au Moyen Age," *Revue des études juives* 128 (1969): 259-266; "Livres médicaux et éducation médicale à propos d'un contrat de Marseille en 1316," *Mediaeval Studies* 42 (1980): 463-470; and "Étudiants juifs à la faculté de médecine de Montpellier, dernier quart du XVIe siècle." *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 243-255.

<sup>30</sup> "The Expulsion of the Jews from France (1306)," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57: Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Volume (1967): 482-489; "L'Opposition *Tsafat*-Provence: La formation du judaïsme du nord de la France," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, edited by Charles Touati and Gérard Nahon, 135-150 (Louvain: Peeters, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> "Faith, Myth, and Politics: The Stereotype of the Jews and Their Expulsion from England and France," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 4 (1985): 351-274; "The Failure of John XXII's Policy toward France and England: Reasons and Outcomes, 1316-1334," *Church History* 55, no. 4 (1986): 423-437; "On the Question of the Expulsion of Jews from England and France," *Zion* 41 (1986): 321-332; "The King, the Church and the Jews: Some Considerations on the Expulsions from England and France," *Medieval History* 13 (1987): 223-236.



up to the expulsion from French-controlled areas, and his subsequent studies are valuable for their work on Occitan communal structures.<sup>32</sup>

Without discounting the important work of the aforementioned scholars, it remains the case that no synthetic history of Occitania has yet been produced. In the absence of such a work, Isadore Twersky's essay "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," first published in 1968 in the *Journal of World History* and subsequently reprinted in the collection *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, has provided the narrative frame through which Occitan Jewry has been viewed.<sup>33</sup> Because of its status within the field, as well as Twersky's scholarly rigor and acumen, "Aspects" warrant careful assessment. On the whole, Twersky offers a coherent and valuable model for the structuring the history of this region, and lays out important avenues of research that have not yet been taken up by current scholars. He begins with an assessment of the region's geographical reach, intellectual output, and period of flourishing, and continues with a socio-political overview. This is followed by a review of Occitan Talmudic culture and concluded with a discussion of the influence of philosophy. Twersky, moreover, cites a wealth of primary sources and incorporates many important secondary works that have bearing on the subject of Occitan Jewry into a brief cultural history of the region, demonstrating how disparate sources, and especially Hebrew sources from the medieval period, can be utilized in identifying an overlooked region and providing it with a history.

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<sup>32</sup> Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 1996. In an e-mail communication (2007), Dr. Pick kindly informed me that he is still in the process of editing this work. See also his "Jewish Aristocracy in Southern France," *Revue des études juives* 161, no. 1-2 (2002): 97-121, and "Medieval Provençal Jewish Self-Government," *Trumah* 15 (2005): 105-137.

<sup>33</sup> *Journal of World History* 11 (1968): 185-207; in *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger, 185-207 (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1971).



At the same time, “Aspects” establishes a problematic paradigm that has not yet been revised. First, Twersky defines a narrow “golden age” for Occitan Jewry: “The chronological span of the period is rather clearly delimited and therefore sustains one’s hopes for a meaningful review of or synoptic approach to the entire period,” he writes.<sup>34</sup> In fact, this “golden age” is clearly delimited only because Twersky makes certain assumptions about Occitan Jewish culture. For one, he relies upon the political history of the French Crown, which means that he effectively ends the Occitan age of productivity with the 1306 expulsion of Jews from French lands.<sup>35</sup> Although the 1306 expulsion, along with the subsequent expulsions of 1315, 1322, and 1394, was an upheaval of great significance, as Susan Einbinder has recently shown,<sup>36</sup> it is a stubborn fact that Occitan culture continued to flourish in the reconstituted community during the first half of the fourteenth century, declining only after c. 1350. In fact, it was during the period after the 1306 expulsion that many of the most celebrated and distinctly Occitan philosophical works were produced by Levi b. Gershom (Ralbag, Gersonides, 1288-1344), Joseph b. Abba-Mari Ibn Kaspi (1279-c. 1340), Moses b. Joshua Narboni (d. c. 1362), Yedayah ha-Penini Bedarshi (c. 1270-c. 1340), and others. The ban proposal failed to materialize and Occitan philosophy was to thrive in the fourteenth century.

Secondly, Twersky defines Occitan culture primarily by its achievements in the realm of halakhah. It is not that he fails to recognize the region’s cultural output outside of talmudic learning; on the contrary, Twersky begins his essay by highlighting the manifold works produced

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<sup>34</sup> “Aspects,” 186.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, Twersky does not cite Saige, who also adheres to the political chronology of the French Crown in writing his history of Occitan Jewry.

<sup>36</sup> Einbinder, *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); see especially the introductory remarks on pp. 1-13.

by Occitan figures. However, the body of his essay is devoted almost entirely to talmudists, and he presents the famed Occitan proclivity for philosophy as an aspect of its talmudic culture:

Probably the most remarkable fact about the development of Jewish culture in Provence is the manner in which a Torah-centered community, widely respected throughout Jewish Europe for its wide-ranging rabbinic scholarship and deep-rooted piety, whose sages were constantly beseeched for scholarly advice and learned guidance, turned with remarkable zest and gusto to the cultivation of philosophy and other extra-Talmudic activities.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, Occitan Jewry declines in tandem with its talmudic culture. Twersky presents Occitania as a region initially immersed in the Ashkenazi culture emanating from the north, which, in the wake of the émigrés flowing in from post-Almohad (Muwaḥḥidūn) Iberia, shifted its cultural allegiance to the Judeo-Arabic culture suddenly made available to them.<sup>38</sup> Once Judeo-Arabic rationalism comes to fruition in the works of Moses Narboni, Joseph Ibn Kaspi, and Gersonides, it is no longer of interest to Twersky: they are off his map. Rather, it is the period of interaction between Ashkenazi and Iberian influences that he finds interesting; when the culture shifts, coming more firmly under the sway of Sefardi currents and attaining its characteristically Occitan synthesis, it is simply epigonic. This view has recently come under greater scrutiny, suggesting instead that the world that produced the controversy was, if more eclectic and disorderly than Occitania was a century earlier, no less dynamic or creative.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Aspects,” 190-191.

<sup>38</sup> See especially “Aspects,” 196-197.

<sup>39</sup> See the special volume of *Studia Rosenthaliana* entitled “Epigonism and the Dynamic of Jewish Culture,” ed. Shlomo Berger and Irene E. Zweip (2007-2008), and especially the article by James T. Robinson, “We Drink Only from the Master’s Water,” 27-60.

## THE MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSIES

Occitan culture has long been distinguished for its role in the controversies over the rationalist ideas that it so eagerly fostered. Although these controversies took on the distinct features of late-medieval eastern Jewish life when they traveled to Egypt and the Levant, a point that is gaining recognition in current scholarship,<sup>40</sup> it is striking that the Maimonidean controversies emanated from Occitania, even in their eastern incarnations.<sup>41</sup> One of Maimonides' first critics, the Alexandrian *dayyan* Pinḥas b. Meshullam (fl. second half of the twelfth century), was a native of Occitania;<sup>42</sup> Solomon Petit (fl. second half of the thirteenth century), who would rouse David b. Abraham Maimuni (1222–1300), Maimonides' grandson, to action, was Occitan. If this was so in the east, certainly Occitania was the center of the controversies in Europe: it was the home of Abraham b. David of Posquières, an early and well-respected critic of the *Mishneh Torah*, of David Qimḥi (Radaq, c. 1160–c. 1235), an advocate for Maimonideanism in the 1230s and of Solomon b. Abraham (fl. first half of thirteenth century), an anti-Maimonidean activist in that same controversy, and of course Abba-Mari, whose epistolary missions to Catalonia twice ignited the inter-regional debate; the place where Maimonides' works met the flames of the friars; and the

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<sup>40</sup> For recent treatment of the Maimonidean controversies in the east, see Sarah Stroumsa, "On the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: The Role of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī" [Hebrew], in *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honour of Joshua Blau, Presented by Friends and Students on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, edited by H. Ben-Shammai, 415–422 (Jerusalem, 1993) and her *The Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: Yosef Ibn Shim'on's Silencing Epistle Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> There are a few exceptions. One is the stringent criticism of Maimonides promulgated by several prominent members of the Baghdadi "Yeshivat Ga'on Ya'aqov" in the late twelfth century. Another is the conflict over allegorical exegesis of scripture which broke out in Yemen in the 1320s, on which see Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy*, 399–400.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict on the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport: Bayard, 1935; reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1970), 28.

site of continuing production of rationalist works, translations, and apologetics for them. The encounter with Greco-Islamic rationalism, and Aristotelianism in particular, fomented conflict within the revealed religions wherever it met them in the medieval period;<sup>43</sup> Occitania became the epicenter of the encounter for Judaism, coloring it with the particularities of the Jewish community there, especially the combination of influences from the north and west and the integration of philosophy into the educational curriculum.

The Maimonidean controversies, beginning with the acrimonious public criticism of Maimonides' works in his lifetime, peaking during the 1230s and again in the 1280s, and finally erupting in 1304-1306, are among the most researched subjects of medieval Judaism. Bernard

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<sup>43</sup> The difficulties of integrating rationalism into medieval Islam and Christianity are, of course, two separate and vast subjects. For Islam, see, *inter alia*: F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1968); A. I. Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent Neutralization of Greek Science in Medieval Islam: A Preliminary Statement," *History of Science* 25 (1987): 223-243; Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma, and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1994); Nimrod Hurvitz, "Miḥna as Self-Defense," *Studia Islamica* 92 (2001): 93-111; J. A. Nawas, "The Mihna of 218 A.H./833 A. D. Revisited: An Empirical Study," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 4 (1996): 698-708; Joel L. Kraemer, "Heresy vs. the State in Medieval Islam," in *Studies in Judaica, Karaitica, and Islamica Presented to Leon Nemoy*, edited by S. R. Brunswick, 167-180 (Ramat Gan, 1982); Iysa A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Orthodoxy: Ijmā and Tawīl in the Conflict between al-Ghazzālī and Ibn Rushd* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); Frouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (New York: St. Martin's, 2001); and George Makdisi, "Magisterium and Academic Freedom in Classical Islam and Medieval Christianity," in *Islamic Law and Jurisprudence: Studies in Honor of Farbat J. Ziadeh*, edited by Nicholas Heer, 117-134 (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1990). For Christianity, see Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford, Calif., 1985); Walter Principe, *Bishops, Theologians, and Philosophers in Conflict at the Universities of Paris and Oxford: The Condemnations of 1270 and 1277* (Louisville, Ky.: Catholic Theological Society of America, 1985); J. M. M. H. Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200-1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Pearl Kibre, *Scholarly Privileges in the Middle Ages: The Rights, Privileges, and Immunities of Scholars and Universities at Bologna, Padua, Paris, and Oxford* (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1962); Mary Martin McLaughlin, *Intellectual Freedom and its Limitations in the University of Paris in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York, 1977); and Averil Cameron and Robert Hoyland, eds., *Doctrine and Debate in the East Christian World, 300-1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).

Septimus, writing in 1983, declared, “The story of the Maimonidean Controversy...is well known.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Maimonidean controversies are touched upon in a wide range of scholarly literature with the assumption that the main contours of their history are familiar to a relatively broad audience. Until recently, the Maimonides controversies have been primarily understood as a recurrent ideological conflict surrounding the reception of Maimonides’ works and their Aristotelian influence: that is, as a war of ideas.

In the nineteenth century, the controversy over rationalism in Judaism was, like other subjects, addressed by identifying and editing the documentary evidence and by analysis within a general historical framework. For instance, the Maimonidean controversies were discussed by Heinrich Graetz in his general histories,<sup>45</sup> while Abraham Geiger wrote an article specifically addressing the controversies.<sup>46</sup> Of the primary documents relating to the controversies, particularly important are those published by David Kaufmann, S. J. Halberstam, and Joseph Kobak in the journals *Ozar Nehmad*, *Jeschurun*, and *Ginzei Nistarot*.<sup>47</sup> More generally, Gustave Saige’s *Les juifs de*

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard Septimus, “Open Rebuke and Concealed Love’: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, edited by Isadore Twersky, 11-34 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 14. Septimus is speaking in reference to the 1232-1233 controversy here.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 1st ed., 12 vols. (Leipzig, 1853-1876), vol. 7; and *דברי ימי ישראל*, translated by S. P. Rabinowitz, 6 vols. (Warsaw, 1897; reprint, Tel Aviv, 1936), 1:209-232.

<sup>46</sup> Abraham Geiger, “Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte des Streites über das Studium der Philosophie in den Jahren 1232 bis 1306,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 5 (1844): 82-123.

<sup>47</sup> Kaufmann published the text of *Hosben ha-Mishpat* in 1884, as detailed above, n. 31. Kobak published an important letter from the controversy of the 1230s, written by Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier to Samuel b. Isaac, in *Ginzei Nistarot* 4 (1878): 11-12, as well as two of the bans against Solomon Petit, discussed above, n. 6. Perhaps the most substantial publication is the collection of texts known as *מלחמת הדת*, published by Halberstam in *Jeschurun* 8 (1872-1875).

*Languedoc* and Jean Régné's *History of the Jews in Aragon* provide a great deal of data on the period and many of its dramatis personae. Similarly, prosopographical works such as Ernest Renan and Adolph Neubauer's *Les rabbins français* and *Les écrivains français*, Heinrich Gross's *Gallia Judaica*, and Leopold Zunz's *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur* continue to provide essential biographical data on figures involved in the controversies who were left out of the conversation in Judaism's transition to early modernity.<sup>48</sup> The *Wissenschaft* era, however, did not provide a comprehensive account of the Maimonidean controversy.

Joseph Sarachek's *Faith and Reason*, written in 1935, was the first narrative history covering the "long century" of conflicts, and to date remains the only such treatment of them.<sup>49</sup> The assumptions and historiographical framework developed by Sarachek have profoundly shaped the discussion of the controversies.<sup>50</sup> Sarachek's significant contribution is to provide a narrative

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<sup>48</sup> Ernest Renan and Adolphe Neubauer, *Les rabbins français* (see above, n. 20) and *Les écrivains juifs français du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 31. (Paris, 1893); Leopold Zunz, "Die jüdischen Dichter der Provence," in *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 459–483 (Berlin: Veit und Comp, 1845; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976); Gustave Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc antérieurement au quatorzième siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1881; reprint, Farnborough, Eng.: Gregg, 1971). Renan and Neubauer's *Les rabbins français* includes a chapter-by-chapter summary of the contents of *Minḥat Qena'ot* on pp. 647–695, which remains one of the few ways the text is accessible in a modern European language.

<sup>49</sup> *Faith and Reason: The Conflict on the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport: Bayard, 1935; reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1970) is also the only full-length work to address the 1304–1306 controversy, which has, generally speaking, received less attention than the 1232–1233 controversy.

<sup>50</sup> In his influential *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Yitzhak Baer highlighted Sarachek's *Faith and Reason* as a secondary source in his treatment of the Maimonidean controversies. Originally written in Hebrew in 1946, the 1992 English translation of the work, made as a revision of the 1959 second edition in consultation with Baer, still names Sarachek's *Faith and Reason* as the preeminent work on the Maimonidean controversies. See *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, translated by Louis Schoffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 1:398 (n. 48). Two recent works on medieval Jewish intellectual history that include chapters on the Maimonidean controversies, *History of Jewish Philosophy* and *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, both edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, have only Sarachek's work to which to refer the reader seeking a general secondary work on these events: see Gregg Stern, "Philosophy in Southern France: Controversy over Philosophic Study and the

framework for a series of events that, while in many ways connected, belong to disparate times and places. He brings together a large collection of source texts that record the disagreements among Jewish leaders regarding Maimonides' works and Aristotelian rationalism, synthesizing and analyzing them in a manner that has been widely accepted for its basic accuracy. With *Faith and Reason* originates the consensus that the controversies of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century primarily dealt with the acceptance of Maimonides' works themselves, while those of the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries concern with the acceptance of rationalism as an exegetical approach for understanding revelation.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, Sarachek's presentation of the events depicts them as an event in intellectual history, the aforementioned "war of ideas" model, as expressed in his work's title.<sup>52</sup>

Another hallmark bequest of *Faith and Reason* is its periodization of the conflicts, at once useful and problematic. Sarachek identifies four Maimonidean controversies, the first being the

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Influence of Averroes upon Jewish Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 281-303 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 298 (n. 1); and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "The Maimonidean Controversy," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 331-349 (New York: Routledge, 1997). Apart from *Faith and Reason*, Sarachek wrote two other, unrelated monographs on medieval Jewish intellectual history: *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1932) and *Don Isaac Abravanel* (New York: Bloch, 1938).

<sup>51</sup> "The earlier conflicts had centered around a different cause. Specifically, it was the theology of Maimonides, and the traditionalists had fought bitterly to destroy the Guide for the Perplexed and the Book of Knowledge. But the war against Maimonides failed...The struggle we are now to study was anti-philosophic, not anti-Maimunist," *Faith and Reason*, 167.

<sup>52</sup> However, it must be noted that Sarachek does so without ignoring the significant socio-political events that occurred over the course of the controversies, although at times his consideration of the relationship between ideas and society is lacking. He addresses, for instance, the institution of the mendicant orders and the papal inquisition against the Christian movements of Occitania, the growth of Christian universities and assertion of royal power, and struggles for jurisdiction and authority among the aristocratic classes of the Jewish *qehillot*.



criticism addressed to Maimonides during his lifetime, especially concerning his view of bodily resurrection; the second, the ban sought by Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier from Nahmanides in Barcelona, which debatably culminated in the burning of *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* and *Sefer ha-Madda* by mendicants in 1232; the third, the conflict primarily between Solomon Petit and David b. Abraham Maimuni in 1290; and the fourth, the controversy instigated by Abba-Mari's correspondence with Ibn Adret in the early fourteenth century.<sup>53</sup> A significant problem is that many of the important figures of the controversies do not fall neatly into Sarachek's periodization. Meir ha-Levi b. Todros Abulafia (Ramah, c. 1165-1244), who edited the first letter collection of the controversies, actually began his anti-rationalist letter-writing campaign while Maimonides was still alive, around 1200; Meir's activities continued into the controversy of the 1230s.<sup>54</sup> Moses b. Hisdai Taqu (thirteenth century), Hillel b. Samuel of Verona (c. 1220–c. 1295), and Shem-Tov b. Joseph Ibn Falaquera (1223/8–after 1290) all commented profoundly on the role of rationalism in Jewish culture around the time of Solomon Petit's activity, but were not directly involved in the controversy over Petit's teachings and do not belong to any particular outbreak of the debate. All of these figures are covered in Sarachek's comprehensive work, but fit poorly into his own rubric.

In addition, the categories of "traditionalist" and "rationalist" are frequently invoked by Sarachek, forming a topos that has predominated in scholarly discourse. By setting up binary categories of traditionalist versus Maimonidean, Sarachek too neatly categorizes the participants in

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<sup>53</sup> Sarachek's understanding of the specifics of each of these controversies is worthy of examination; for instance, his statement that "The free-thinker Levi ben Abraham (1250-1320) was directly responsible for the anti-philosophic outbreak," *Faith and Reason*, 191.

<sup>54</sup> Meir Abulafia is the subject of Bernard Septimus's careful analysis in *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*.



the controversy and their interests. He overlooks the degree to which the feuding sides were *both* influenced by rationalist ideas on the one hand, and the rabbinic heritage on the other:

Maimonides is universally referred to with great deference, while the status of halakhah as the governing theoretical basis of Jewish life, both communal and private, is never questioned by “traditionalists” and “rationalists” alike. In fact, there was a wide spectrum of opinion about the authority of human reason in relation to revelation, with a broad, moderate middle that was intentionally but artificially split by the introduction of legislation banning the underage study of non-Jewish philosophy. For this reason, I have chosen to refer to the persons described in *Minḥat Qena’ot* by the descriptive terms “ban proponents” and “ban opponents,” reflecting only their position vis-à-vis this particular legislation, without indicating their beliefs regarding the ideal role of philosophy in Jewish culture, which varies considerably among the participants in the controversy.

Daniel J. Silver’s *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240*, published in 1965, is the next monograph written about the Maimonidean controversies and, like Sarachek’s work, remains a foundational text of the study of these events. Silver’s work, as announced in its title, concentrates on the debate over Maimonides’ works that occurred during his lifetime—before *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (*Dalālat al-Ḥā’irīn*) had been translated into Hebrew—and in the 1230s, although Silver does briefly discuss the events of 1304-1306.<sup>55</sup> Though it infrequently acknowledges *Faith and Reason*, Daniel Silver’s *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean*

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965). Silver also published “Who Denounced the ‘Moreh’?” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 [1967]: 498-514, but little else.

*Controversy* substantially mirrors Sarachek's understanding of the events of the controversies. Silver emphasizes perhaps even more than does Sarachek the degree to which the conflict was spurred by events in Christian culture, especially the missionary efforts of the friars.<sup>56</sup> This is his answer to the question, posed in his introductory remarks, "Why so late in the marriage of Athens and Jerusalem should bitter controversy have developed?"<sup>57</sup> Specifically, he sees the controversies emerging out of a cultural rift within Jewish society—between traditionalists and men "whose hearts were committed to the Academy rather than to the *yeshibab*"—that was exacerbated by the machinations of ecclesiastics.<sup>58</sup>

Silver's choice to end his narrative at 1240 is an interpretive act: it emphasizes his view that the crux of the disagreement was about Maimonides himself, a matter which, like Sarachek, he sees as settled by the time of the 1304-1306 controversy.<sup>59</sup> Maimonides was only the proximate, rather than the primary, cause of later debate, in Silver's view: "the Maimonidean Controversy [of 1304-1305] was essentially not a debate over Maimonides," neither "Maimonides the man nor Maimonides the philosopher nor the correctness of Maimonides' philosophic system."<sup>60</sup> Rather, the underlying motive of those challenging the "marriage of Athens and Jerusalem" was the

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<sup>56</sup> Apart from this modification, Silver deviates little from Sarachek. Of interest is his chapter on Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel, an Occitan who corresponded with Maimonides whom Silver presents as a "traditionalist" accepting of rationalism. However, neither in its organization nor in its analysis does *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* present a major innovation over Sarachek's 1935 achievement.

<sup>57</sup> Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 197-198.

<sup>59</sup> Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 1, 3-4.

preservation of traditional Judaism, which, they argued, is threatened by speculative thought.<sup>61</sup>

Although he acknowledges that this was the case throughout the long century of controversy, Silver deemphasizes the later period of controversy because, the contributions of Maimonides having been assimilated into Jewish culture, this later debate is, in his view, not at the heart of Jewish society: it has become a radical, and therefore peripheral, discussion.

The prominence of Sarachek and Silver's monographs in the historiography of the Maimonidean controversies stems, perhaps, from the way that the Maimonidean controversies have been discussed as an element of other narratives, especially the history of ideas in Jewish culture and the social and communal structure of Jewish communities.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Julius Guttmann discussed the conflicts from the perspective of the history of ideas,<sup>63</sup> while Ben-Zion Dinaburg<sup>64</sup> and Salo Baron addressed them as part of the narrative history of medieval Jewry.<sup>65</sup> Baer devoted several sections of his general history of Jewish life in Christian Iberia to the controversies, writing the conflicts into the historiography of Iberian Jewries.<sup>66</sup> In some respects, this divide has continued to hold even as recent scholarship contributes to a richer contextualization of the controversies.

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<sup>61</sup> Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 1.

<sup>62</sup> These thematic subject areas have their origins in the later *Wissenschaft des Judentums* era, but reflect ongoing scholarly concerns.

<sup>63</sup> הפילוסופיה של היהדות (Jerusalem, 1951), 169-191; translated into English as *The Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*, translated by David W. Silverman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

<sup>64</sup> ישראל בגולה (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1936; 2nd rev. ed., 1966), 2:494 ff. Translated into English as *Israel in the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969).

<sup>65</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed., 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952-1983), 10:82-92.

<sup>66</sup> Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, translated by Louis Schoffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 1:96-110, 289-305.

Charles Touati<sup>67</sup> and James T. Robinson's<sup>68</sup> research falls mainly within the discipline of philosophy,<sup>69</sup> while Joseph Shatzmiller<sup>70</sup> and, to a certain extent, Azriel Shohat<sup>71</sup> proceed as

<sup>67</sup> "La controverse de 1303-1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques," *Revue des études juives* 117 (1968): 21-37; and "Les deux conflits autour de Maimonide et des études philosophiques," in *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc, XIIIe siècle—début XIVe siècle*, edited by Marie-Humbert Vicaire and Bernhard Blumenkranz, 173-184 (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1977).

<sup>68</sup> Of Robinson's work, see especially "The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval 'Provence,'" in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 193-224 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); "We Drink Only from the Master's Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200-1306," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2007-2008): 27-60.

<sup>69</sup> *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (New York: Routledge, 2009); "The Crisis of Philosophical Allegory in Languedocian-Jewish Culture (1304-6)," in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, edited by Jon Whitman, 187-207 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); "Philosophy in Southern France: Controversy over Philosophic Study and the Influence of Averroes upon Jewish Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 281-303 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); "What Divided the Moderate Maimonidean Scholars of 1305?" in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); and see also his dissertation, "Menaḥem ha-Me'iri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy" (Harvard University, 1995).

<sup>70</sup> Of Shatzmiller's many works that touch upon Occitan culture and the controversies, the most relevant are: "The Small Epistle of Excuse from Kalonymous ben Kalonymous" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 10 (1966): 9-52; "Toward a Picture of the First Maimonidean Controversy" [Hebrew], *Zion* 34 (1969): 126-138; "A Letter from Rabbi Asher ben Gershom to the Rabbis of France at the Time of the Controversy about the Works of Maimonides" [Hebrew], in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel, vol. 1, in Memory of Zvi Avneri*, edited by Akiba Gilboa, 129-140 (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1970); "Rationalisme et orthodoxie religieuse chez les Juifs provençaux au commencement du XIVe siècle," *Provence Historique* 22 (1972): 261-286; "Between Abba Mari and the Rashba: The Negotiations Which Preceded the Ban in Barcelona." [Hebrew.] In *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel, vol. 3*, edited by B. Oded, Zvi Avneri, Akiba Gilboa and Uriel Rappaport, 121-137 (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1974); "Contacts et échanges entre savants juifs et chrétiens à Montpellier vers 1300." In *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc, XIIIe siècle—début XIVe siècle*, edited by Marie-Humbert Vicaire and Bernhard Blumenkranz, 337-344. Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1977; "In Search of the 'Book of Figures': Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 7/8 (1982/83): 383-407; "The Forms of the *Twelve Constellations*: A Fourteenth Century Controversy," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, edited by Moshe Idel, Warren Zev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988); "The 'Form of the Lion' for Kidneys and the Dispute on the Study of Sciences in the Early Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990): 397-408; "Étudiants juifs à la faculté de médecine de Montpellier, dernier quart du XVIe siècle." *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 243-255.

historians. The political dimensions of the 1304-1306 controversy are treated in Marc Saperstein's important 1986 article, in which he suggests that Ibn Adret modified his approach to the conflict under the influence of French Crown policies, profoundly shaping its outcome. Specifically, Saperstein proposes that Ibn Adret's back-and-forth stance on assuming jurisdictional authority in Occitania—initial reluctance followed by insistence, only to withdraw the claim—was governed by royal attempts at centralization that included heavy additional tax burdens for Jews to which they were not subject in seigniorial domains, and often made use of the papal Inquisition to extend power.<sup>72</sup> In addition to a robust bibliography of works focused on the controversies, the conflicts often appear in works on other subjects, such as Dov Schwartz's work on astral magic, Susan Einbinder's studies of French and Occitan Jewish poetry, or Nina Caputo's monograph on Nahmanides.<sup>73</sup> To a large extent, the groundbreaking analyses of Ram Ben-Shalom and Dov Schwartz have begun to bring together the intellectual and socio-political dimensions of the 1304-1306 controversy, though it has been treated by each scholar in a series of research articles and not in monograph.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “ברורים בפרשת הפולמוס הראשון על ספרי הרמב”ם,” *Zion* 36 (1971): 27-60.

<sup>72</sup> Marc Saperstein, “The Conflict over the Rashba's Herem on Philosophical Study: A Political Perspective,” *Jewish History* 1 (1986): 27-38.

<sup>73</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Studies in Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, translated by David Louvish and Batya Stein (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 28-39, 124-166, and *passim*; Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), especially 84-90, and *No Place of Rest*; Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community, and Messianism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Ram Ben-Shalom, “The Ban Placed By the Community of Barcelona on the Study of Philosophy and Allegorical Preaching: A New Study,” *Revue des études juives* 159 (2000): 387-404; “Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages,” *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 23-71; and מול תרבות נוצרית: תודעה היסטורית ודימויי עבר בקרב יהודי

More recently, Gregg Stern has expanded his earlier work on Menaḥem b. Solomon ha-Me'iri (Don Vidal Solomon, 1249-1316), Occitan scriptural interpretation, and aspects of the controversy into a comprehensive account of the 1304-1306 controversy beginning with its thirteenth-century antecedents and ending not with the expulsion, but with the continuation of Occitan culture in Provence and the Roussillon.<sup>75</sup> His scope differs from that of the present work in that he takes a broader, synthetic view than the one taken here, in which the book *Minḥat Qena'ot* and the people and events described within it are the central text. Stern asks questions about the role of scriptural interpretation and the authority of philosophy in fueling the controversy, whereas this work asks about the motivations of the ban proponents, their understanding of ideational transgression, and the way these were applied in the case of Levi b. Abraham. Stern's 2009 monograph, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and*

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ספרד ופרובנס בימי הביניים (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Zevi, 2006). Dov Schwartz, "Changing Fronts in the Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997): 61-82; "Greek Wisdom': A Reexamination in the Period of the Controversy over the Study of Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Sinai* 104 (1989): 148-153; "Rationalism and Conservatism: The Philosophy of R. Solomon Ben Adret' Circle" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 32-33 (1994): 143-182; "A Study of the Philosophical Variety in Spain and Provence before the Expulsion" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 49 (1991): 5-23; "Toward Research into Philosophical Circles in Pre-Expulsion Spain and Provence," *Trumah* 12 (2002): 113-132; "The Debate on Astral Magic in Fourteenth-Century Provence" [Hebrew], *Zion* 48 (1993); "The Debate over the Maimonidean Theory of Providence in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 2 (1995): 185-196; "Theology and Learning in Medieval Jewish Philosophy: A Chapter in Maimonidean Influence" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 37 (1996): 153-179; אמונה ותבונה: דרכי הוויכוח בהגות היהודית בימיה הביניים (Tel Aviv, 2001); and בירורים רעיוניים בסוגית הפלמוסים על הפילוסופיה בימי הביניים, *Kovetz 'al Yad* 14 (1998): 299-348.

<sup>75</sup> Gregg Stern, "Menaḥem ha-Me'iri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy." Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995; "The Crisis of Philosophical Allegory in Languedocian-Jewish Culture (1304-6)," in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, edited by Jon Whitman, 187-207 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); "Philosophy in Southern France: Controversy over Philosophic Study and the Influence of Averroes upon Jewish Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 281-303 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); "What Divided the Moderate Maimonidean Scholars of 1305?" in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 347-367 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

*Controversy in Medieval Languedoc*, is a much-needed analysis of the social and philosophical context of the “last” controversy;<sup>76</sup> Stern covers the diffusion of philosophical work into Occitan culture, the impact of intellectual contact between Jews and Christians in an ascendant Latin West, and the significant philosophical question that governed so much of the debate: what source of authority does knowledge require? He also examines ha-Me’iri’s “philosophic spirituality” as a demonstration of the transformation of Occitan culture that led to confrontation at the turn of the fourteenth century. Stern then provides a narrative of the controversy as well as its aftermath.

Both the newer socio-political and the earlier intellectual-historical approach to understanding the Maimonidean controversies illuminate crucial aspects of the conflict without fully probing the worldviews they reveal. It is difficult to argue, reading the words of Abba-Mari, that he is not engaged in a conflict over ideas, an argument that can legitimately be termed intellectual. It is also significant that Abba-Mari’s motivations, as well as the reaction of Ibn Adret, are governed in part by concerns about communal and religious authority and the impact of political rulers on the Jewish community. What is so striking about Abba-Mari’s project is a combination of these two factors, the intellectual and the social: he offers us a glimpse into the social lives of ideas in the late medieval period, into the ways in which ideas and intellectual work affected people’s actions, and, conversely, the ways in which actions spurred the transmission of ideas.

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<sup>76</sup> *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (New York: Routledge, 2009).



The book *Minḥat Qena'ot*, the fruit of Abba-Mari's labors, was first printed in Pressburg in 1838. According to its editor, Mordecai Leib Bisliches (1786–1851), who also edited Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* and Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera's *Moreh ha-Moreh*, his edition is based on a manuscript from the Pisarro Library in Florence.<sup>77</sup> Such a manuscript is no longer extant, and its whereabouts are unknown. Extant today are eight manuscripts of *Minḥat Qena'ot* in various stages of completion:

- (1) Ms. Neofiti 12 of the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome;
- (2) Ms. Cod. Parm. 2782 of the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma;
- (3) Ms. Guenzburg 63 of the Russian State Library, Moscow;
- (4) Ms. Montefiore 271 (formerly Halberstam 194), which was sold to a private collector in 2004;
- (5) Ms. héb. 970 (formerly Oratoire 108) of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris;
- (6) Mich. 596 (formerly numbered Mich. 477) of the Bodleian Library, Oxford;
- (7) Mss. Reggio 24 of the Bodleian Library, Oxford;
- (8) Ms. 110 in the private collection of David Sofer, London.

Of these, only Ms. Montefiore 271 is explicitly dated, to 1458. Ms. Neofiti 12 appears to be the oldest of the manuscripts, perhaps dating as early as the fourteenth century; Mss. Parma 2782 and BNF héb. 596 are tentatively dated to the fifteenth century.<sup>78</sup> In addition, several of the letters included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* are preserved in parallel in Ibn Adret's responsa, and, among the more than one hundred extant manuscripts of Ibn Adret's responsa awaiting detailed examination, there

<sup>77</sup> "Bisliches (Bisseliches), Mordecai (Moses) Leib" *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 3:726. Notably, *Minḥat Qena'ot* was printed under the approbation of Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer, 1762–1839), who was then rabbi in Pressburg.

<sup>78</sup> This information is drawn from the catalog of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. See also the manuscript descriptions of Ernest Renan and Adolphe Neubauer in *Les rabbins français du commencement du XIVe siècle*, *Histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 27 (Paris, 1877), 652–653, who knew of the manuscripts presently at Oxford, Parma, and Moscow, as well as two fragmentary manuscripts, Ms. Turin V.30 and Ms. Paris 970.



may be additional instances of letters included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* or concerning the controversy. However, it appears that the bulk of *Minḥat Qena'ot*, as well as its structure as an intentionally edited text, was preserved separately from the responsa of the renowned Ibn Adret.<sup>79</sup>

In 1991, Ḥayyim Zalman Dimitrovsky released two volumes of his planned critical edition of Ibn Adret's responsa.<sup>80</sup> Beginning with Ibn Adret's letters on theological matters, Dimitrovsky also included Abba-Mari's *Minḥat Qena'ot*. Although his notes and critical apparatus are a significant achievement, Dimitrovsky is writing primarily for a religious audience, as his introductory remarks indicate. He defers giving a key to the seven manuscripts he consulted to a more comprehensive introduction that he intends to write, but which has not yet appeared; these are represented in the apparatus by the letters פ, ו, ה, ד, ג, ב, and ש.<sup>81</sup> Based on the critical apparatus, I have identified the manuscripts as follows:

- ב = Ms. Mich. 596, Bodleian Library, Oxford
- ג = Ms. Gruenzburg 63, Russian State Library, Moscow
- ד = Ms. héb. 970, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
- ה = Ms. Montefiore 271, private collection
- ו = Ms. Neofiti 12, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Adret's responsa have a complicated transmission history. The conventional numbering calls the Bologna, 1538 edition (reprinted in Venice, 1545 and Hanau, 1610) "Volume 1" of Ibn Adret's responsa; the Livorno (Leghorn) edition of 1657, titled *Toledot Adam*, "Volume 2"; the collection published also in Livorno in 1778 "Volume 3"; the Vilna edition of 1881 "Volume 4"; the third collection published in Livorno in 1825—prior to the Vilna edition—"Volume 5"; and the two collections published in Warsaw in 1898 [or 1908] (though erroneously bearing the date 1868 on their cover pages), "Volume 6" and "Volume 7." An eighth volume, published in Warsaw in 1883, contains responsa written by Ibn Adret but attributed to his teacher, Moses b. Naḥman (Ramban, Naḥmanides, 1194-1270). Excluded from this scheme are two early editions, the collections printed in Rome in 1481 and in Constantinople in 1516, as well as the 1803 Salonika edition.

<sup>80</sup> 2 vols. תשובות הרשב"א: לרבינו שלמה ב"ר אברהם אדרת; וצורף להן ספר מנחת קנאות לר' אבא מארי דלונל (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1990).

<sup>81</sup> It is my intention to identify the manuscripts in the course of my research.

פ = Ms. Cod. Parm. 2782, Biblioteca Palatina, Parma

ψ = Ms. Reggio 24, Bodleian Library, Oxford

Dimitrovsky notes that he identified two recensions, of which η and ι are the earliest surviving representatives; his edition is based on η, while the lost Florentine manuscript appears to have been related to ι.<sup>82</sup> Among the textual problems Dimitrovsky mentions is the important issue of chapter divisions, which are different in the Pressburg edition from what they are in any of the manuscripts that he consulted.<sup>83</sup> He also includes six letters that are not found in the Pressburg edition.<sup>84</sup>

Dimitrovsky suggests that there were two main recensions of *Minḥat Qena'ot* represented by the eight extant manuscripts, and that the lost Florentine manuscript which formed the basis of the Pressburg edition was a defective version of the slightly shorter recension.<sup>85</sup> One difference among the manuscripts (though probably not the recensions) appears to be the appending of additional letters to Abba-Mari's compilation in the course of its transmission. Later editors sometimes included letters written by Abba-Mari after the controversy had abated, such as his eulogies for Ibn Adret and ha-Me'iri (1310 and 1315, respectively). Some texts that were not directly related to the 1304-1306 controversy were included, such as the 1290 ban against Solomon

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<sup>82</sup> See Dimitrovsky's introduction, 1:16-18.

<sup>83</sup> Dimitrovsky, Introduction, 1:17-18.

<sup>84</sup> A recent edition of Ibn Adret's responsa, published by Mekhon Even Isra'el, includes eighteen additional letters from the Parma and Neofiti manuscripts; see *שאלות ותשובות הרשב"א החדש והמפואר*, vol. 10, ספר מנחת קנאות, edited by I. Y. Wiedbesky (Jerusalem, 2005), 163-248. This edition otherwise follows the Pressburg edition, with some corrections.

<sup>85</sup> See Dimitrovsky's introduction, especially 1:17-18. He calls the recension on which the Pressburg edition was based the "second" recension.

Petit, printed at the end of the Pressburg edition; on the other hand, letters related to the controversy, notably, *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut* and *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, were never appended to *Minḥat Qena'ot*.<sup>86</sup> It is not entirely clear that Abba-Mari completed his work, as there is no concluding editorial note and the final letter is a somewhat arbitrary ending point; four of the manuscripts do include a conventional closing formula, but this seems to have been a later scribal emendation.<sup>87</sup> These are, however, relatively minor variations, even if some of the additional inclusions are of great historical significance.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, there is one other letter collections compiled in the course of the earlier Maimonidean controversies: the *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* edited by Meir b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia

<sup>86</sup> The Petit bans are found in MQp, pp. 182-185. This section of additions is also found in several of the manuscripts, and is sometimes reprinted in editions of Ibn Adret's responsa. It was included by A. A. Lichtenberg in the 'Iggerot Qena'ot section of *Qoveṣ Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-'Iggerotav* (Leipzig, 1859), 23a-24b. Yedayah ha-Penini's *Ketav* (or 'Iggeret) *ha-Hitnazzlut* was preserved on its own in manuscript and included in Volume 1 of Ibn Adret's responsa (no. 418); it was also published as a separate text twice in the nineteenth century, at Lemberg in 1809 and in *Kokebe Yizḥaq* 5 (1846-1869): 12-17. Interestingly, three manuscripts of *Minḥat Qena'ot* indicate "יבא אחר זה כתב התנצלות לחכם הגדול ר' ידעיה הבדרשי בר"אברהם בדרשי ז"ל"; see Dimitrovsky's apparatus to MQd 120, p. 841. Samuel b. Joseph de Lunel (c. 1300)'s *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, a lengthy treatise addressed to Menahem ha-Me'iri, was first published from manuscript by David Kaufmann in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz*, Heb. sec., 143-174 (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884; Reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1974); see also Kaufmann's introduction to the document, "Simon b. Josefs Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdischen Exegese und Predigt im Mittelalter," 143-151. Two other related letters by Samuel b. Joseph were also published by Kaufmann: "Deux lettres de Siméon ben Joseph (En Duran de Lunel)," *Revue des études juives* 29 (1894): 214-228. One is addressed to Ibn Adret, while the third concerns not the controversy but rather the 1306 expulsion. Samuel's three extant letters about the controversy are preserved in a unique manuscript, the Bodleian Library's Ms. Heb. 280. Several letters preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* were also transmitted in the responsa of Ibn Adret (Volume 1, no. 167, 825, in conjunction with no. 413, 424-428) and Asher b. Yehiel (no. 24).

<sup>87</sup> "נשלם ספר מנחת קנאות למשמרת לאות...": see Dimitrovsky's critical apparatus, p. 841 (at the end of MQd 120). This closing formula does appear in the Pressburg edition (MQp 101, p. 180).

<sup>88</sup> They are minor, for example, in comparison to *Sefer Hasidim*, on which see Ivan G. Marcus, "The Recensions and Structure of *Sefer Hasidim*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 131-153.

(Ramah, c. 1170-1244), which pertains largely to the controversy over resurrection that occurred during and immediately after Maimonides' lifetime.<sup>89</sup>

#### TOWARDS A REEVALUATION OF THE 1304-1306 CONTROVERSY

*Minḥat Qena'ot* permits us an unusually large, if sometimes clouded, window into an understudied region of medieval Jewish life, just as it reached a critical turning point which reverberated throughout the Jewish world—a controversial question which continues to animate discussion of Jewish life well into the modern era. It is at once particular in its character and universal in its implications. A panoramic view is required to understand the controversy and the world from which it springs, a view that the window we possess does not necessarily permit us. Only those men who participated in the discussion are, naturally, represented, and they are not just the educated elite, but, presumably, a small part of the aristocracy.<sup>90</sup> Abba-Mari, scrupulous an editor though he was, was an editor nonetheless, who inevitably and at times intentionally obscures

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<sup>89</sup> There is also *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, the collection of texts that comprises the third part of the important *Qoveṣ Teshuvot ha-Rambam* edited by Abraham Lichtenberg and published in Leipzig in 1859, but this is a modern compilation of controversy texts.

<sup>90</sup> Prosopographical data preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* reveals that the three communities described in some detail, Montpellier, Barcelona, and Perpignan, were small, and that the educated class which participated in the controversy was composed of a small group of highly interrelated men—meaning that communal governance and politics were a family affair, and therefore inevitably influenced by interpersonal motivations.

The interpretation of prosopographical data relies upon onomastics, an area little researched in the context of medieval Jewish societies, but see the series of studies, *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* edited by Aaron Demsky, et al., and published by Bar Ilan University Press, of which five volumes have been published (1997, 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011). A brief summary of medieval naming practices as reflected by the materials in the Cairo genizah can be found in S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 1:357-358.

the view. And all participants wrote in a manner that makes it difficult to extract data from their letters. Despite the expansive writing concentrated on a single subject, the motives of the ban proponents and their opposition, including the participants' understanding of ideational transgression, must be carefully considered.

I begin this task by giving a detailed reconstruction of the events of the controversy in Chapter 1. Narratives are necessarily interpretive, and mine is no exception, offering an interpretation of the course of the controversy and an analysis of the changing positions of Abba-Mari and especially Ibn Adret during the controversy. Nevertheless, the reconstructed timeline is intended to be primarily descriptive and to provide a reference for the two years' worth of events examined in the body of the work. It also introduces the primary actors in the controversy. Following the narrative description of the events of the controversy is a detailed examination of the primary source for these events in Chapter 2. *Minḥat Qena'ot* is addressed as a textual object deliberately constructed by Abba-Mari, but also displaying his awareness of the emerging concept of historical objectivity. Its paratextual features, such as Abba-Mari's use of introductory notes to the letters, are detailed in order to make analysis in subsequent chapters more transparent and accurate. The texts and the paratexts are considered in light of genre, including their epistolary form and literary style, and they are contextualized as part of a pragmatic system of writing and delivering letters. Finally, the compilation's predecessors are examined as possible antecedents.

Having described the events of the controversy and examined the source material in depth, the work now asks, in Chapter 3: What characterized ban proponents and their opponents? Rather than traditionalists and rationalists, this examination finds a wide spectrum with a broad center

that is deliberately, but artificially, polarized by the introduction of legislation, first in Barcelona and then in Montpellier. I propose that due to this spectrum, it is more correct to characterize participants by their support for or opposition to the ban proposal, either through their own writing or through their signature to others' letters. This analysis is preliminary to answering questions of the ban proponents' motives because their understanding of the core issues in the debate—especially ideational transgression—is influenced by their largely moderate, centrist position with regard to the value of external, non-revelatory wisdom.

Chapter 4 turns to answering the questions at the heart of the debate: What were ban proponents afraid of? What danger did they seek to obviate in their communities? This is attempted by careful consideration of the key phrases proponents used to deride their opponents—*min*, *kofer*, and others—as well as the stock phrases they cited from supposed radical *darshanim* (preachers) and *melamdim* (teachers). The terminology they used is shown to be largely uninfluenced by Maimonides' works or by his legacy of standardizing and codifying, a project eagerly undertaken by Occitans and Iberians alike over the course of the thirteenth century. Instead, their usage of the terms and phrases is imprecise and predominantly influenced by rabbinic paradigms. In addition, the use of stock phrases to describe the positions of so-called radicals demonstrates that few ban opponents were conversant with philosophical texts or interested in their particularities. What concerned them were the implications of certain ideas presented to susceptible individuals. Without a strict creed or a halakhic definition of ideational transgression, ban proponents' fear of discarding of the halakhic system, leading perhaps to antinomian behavior,

was never formalized. Instead they bypassed the problem by restricting access to philosophical texts.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines a test case for ideational transgressor, the famously maligned Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim (c. 1245–c. 1315). Levi serves as an example of what would—and would not—happen to a person accused of ideational transgression: in Levi’s case, exposing young men to philosophy through his writing and teaching. However, Levi’s demonization was far from complete, with even Ibn Adret and his principal informant in Perpignan, Crescas Vidal (fl. late thirteenth century), treating Levi’s case equivocally. This chapter proposes a new reason why Levi was targeted and examines the treatment of ideational transgression in the absence of a legal definition of the concept. At this point, it is possible to draw conclusions about the conceptualization of ideational transgression by ban proponents, taking into account the great degree of variation and subtlety in their views on philosophy and their treatment of potential transgressors.

On a mid-summer day in 1304, an aristocrat named Abba-Mari sat in the city of Montpellier composing a letter to a rabbinic authority three hundred and fifty kilometers away, in Barcelona. In many respects, the two cities—and the two men—shared a common culture, both having been shaped by the interaction between traditional modes of Jewish life and a pastiche of Islamic and Christian influences.<sup>1</sup> In other respects, the two cities and men were worlds apart. Barcelona, the jewel of Catalonia and the economic and cultural capital of the Kingdom of Aragon, had emerged triumphant following centuries of Reconquista.<sup>2</sup> Having been affected little by the eighth-century Arab conquest, Barcelona had bided its time under the protection of counts with nominal ties to France.<sup>3</sup> By 1300, it had long since severed this political affiliation, having cast its

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<sup>1</sup> On the post-Andalusi cultural complex, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-25; Avraham Grossman, "בין ספרד לצרפת," In *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart* [Hebrew Volume], edited by Aaron Mirsky, Avraham Grossman and Yosef Kaplan, 75-101 (Jerusalem, 1988); Jonathan Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007), 1-16; and Marc Saperstein, "The Social and Cultural Context: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 294-330 (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> On the influence of the Reconquista upon Iberian Jewry, see Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); Carmen Batlle (Carme Batlle i Gallart), "The Growth of the Cities of the Crown of Aragon in the Later Middle Ages," in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Robert I. Burns*, edited by Paul E. Chevedden, Donald J. Kagay and P. G. Padilla, 321-344 (Leiden: Brill, 1997) and, more broadly, *Història de Catalunya, Vol. 3: L'expansió baixmedieval (segles XIII-XV)*, edited by Josep Termes and Pierre Vilar, (Barcelona, 1988); and J. N. Hillgarth, *The Problem of a Catalan Mediterranean Empire, 1229-1327* (Longman, 1975). See also Claude Carrère, *Barcelone, centre économique à l'époque des difficultés, 1380-1462* (Paris and La Haye: Mouton et Cie, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> On this period specifically, see Stephen P. Bensch, *Barcelona and its Rulers, 1096-1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



lot, instead, with the burgeoning Christian states of northern Iberia.<sup>4</sup> Culturally, the Jewish community of Barcelona was at the epicenter of the post-Judeo-Arabic cultural shift, already awash in philosophy and belles-lettres when they had only begun to captivate Jews north of the Pyrenees.<sup>5</sup> Solomon Ibn Adret, the man to whom Abba-Mari addressed his missive, was approaching seventy in 1304. A student of Moses b. Naḥman of Gerona (Ramban, 1194-1270) and heir to the latter's "school," Ibn Adret commanded authority as the preeminent decisor of Catalonia and, indeed, as one of the leading legal scholars of the era.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to Baer's classic study, see Elka Klein, *Jews, Christian Society, and Royal Power in Medieval Barcelona* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006; and Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London and Portland, Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> On the transfer of the Judeo-Arabic tradition to Occitania, see, in addition to Isadore Twersky's "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," James T. Robinson, "The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval 'Provence'," in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 193-224 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005) and "We Drink Only from the Master's Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200-1306," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40, "Epigonism and the Dynamic of Jewish Culture," ed. Shlomo Berger and Irene E. Zweip (2007-2008): 27-60; and Colette Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 212-246. On Islamic rationalism (*falsāfah*), see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam," in idem., and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 21-26, and in the same volume, Sari Nuseibeh, "Epistemology," 824-830; and Steven Harvey, "Islamic Philosophy and Jewish Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, edited by S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 349-369 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On Arabic belles-lettres (*adab*), see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, edited by Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Rina Drory, "The Maqama," 190-210, Beatrice Gruendler, "The Qasida," 211-232, and Tova Rosen, "The Muwashshah," 165-189; and Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Although Ibn Adret studied under Naḥmanides and became widely acknowledged as the principal successor to and perpetuator of Naḥmanides and his school, it should be noted that it is Ibn Adret's cousin, Jonah b. Abraham Gerondi (c. 1200-1263), to whom Ibn Adret consistently refers as "my teacher." Both of his prominent teachers had important contacts in Occitania with whom they corresponded frequently, including the topic of the Maimonidean controversies of the thirteenth century. On the cultural influences that shaped Naḥmanides' works, see Bernard Septimus, "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love': Naḥmanides

Abba-Mari, on the other hand, writing from Montpellier, was a middle-aged man, established as a *nikbbad* (aristocrat) but not as an intellectual authority.<sup>7</sup> The city where he resided occupied a geographic and cultural position deep within Occitania, despite being, politically speaking, a territory of Majorca in 1304. As early as the twelfth century, Montpellier was regarded, in the words of Isadore Twersky, as “a citadel of Talmudic learning and a bastion of general culture.”<sup>8</sup> Among Occitan communities, however, Montpellier was, even at the turn of the

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and the Andalusian Tradition,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, edited by Isadore Twersky, 11-34 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Moshe Idel, “Nahmanides: Kabbala, Halakha, and Spiritual Leadership,” *Tarbiz* 64 (1994/95): 550-555; on Gerondi, see Gidon Rothstein, “Working Towards Accommodation: Rabbenu Yonah Gerondi’s Slow Acceptance of Andalusian Rabbinic Traditions,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2003): 87-104.

<sup>7</sup> The term *nikbbad* is the most common of several terms (*yehid*, *meyuhad*, *ne’eman*) that describe men of importance in a given community in the text of *Minḥat Qena’ot*. The usage of these terms is imprecise: it does not indicate a hereditary, regimented class hierarchy or a concept of nobility akin to that of the landed or titled classes in medieval Christian Europe. For this reason, I have translated the group of terms as “aristocrat,” indicating a person of eminence. There is some evidence within the text of *Minḥat Qena’ot*, deserving of further investigation, indicating that there are distinctions among the terms used, perhaps even substantive distinctions. See, for example, Abba-Mari’s statement, “I commanded the messenger to call all the aristocrats (*nikbbadim*), who are known as *meyuhadim*, to attend a meeting of the leaders of the community,” cited in Chapter 2 (MQp 21, p. 62 / MQd 39, p. 418, ll. 53-54). Here, however, my usage of the term “aristocracy” is intended more broadly and less technically to include the wealthy, members of reputable families, scholars, and others in positions of power (these categories not being mutually exclusive), without being a technical term. All the voices represented in *Minḥat Qena’ot* belong to this segment of the population, and moreover, from what is known, consist of only a segment of the aristocracy. In other words, the controversialists represent a portion of an elite minority, not the whole of their communities.

Concerning Abba-Mari’s age, it appears that he was middle-aged at the time of the controversy, considering that he had at least one married son. The married son is known from Moses b. Samuel b. Asher’s description of Abba-Mari’s son as his son-in-law in MQp 38, p. 84 / MQd 57, p. 506, l. 64. Moses refers to the son-in-law as Meshullam, and indeed a Meshullam b. Abba-Mari appears as a signatory in four of the seven manuscripts (ב, ג, ד, ו) to letter MQp 23 / MQd 41/42 and is printed by Dimitrovsky, p. 430, l. 70. (Specifically, the signature appears as *משלם ברי אבא מרי צבי*, while the other three, as well as the Pressburg edition, have *משלם ברי מאיר צבי*: see MQp 23, p. 66. The honorific *באמונתו יחיה צדיק* could be a pointed reference to our Abba-Mari b. Moses.)

<sup>8</sup> Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 29. As Twersky notes, Montpellier was also the seat of an influential *beit din*: one of the three

fourteenth century, somewhat overshadowed by the éclat of Lunel and Narbonne, the former the seat of perhaps the most celebrated of Occitan academies, the latter ennobled by a legend of a principedom (*nesi'ut*) proffered to the Qalonymos family by Charlemagne himself.<sup>9</sup> These three venerable communities do not appear as economically vibrant at the turn of the fourteenth century as they once were, but their continued cultural dominance in the region is attested by the tendency of aristocrats to note their origins in these cities, among them Abba-Mari, whose appellation ha-Yarḥi, following the Occitan custom, discussed in the Introduction, of Hebraizing surnames of place origin, noted his family's lineage in this highly esteemed city.<sup>10</sup> If Ibn Adret was the towering

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most prominent among Occitan rabbinical courts, according to a contemporary of the Abraham b. David of Posquières (Ra'avad [Rabad], c. 1125-1198): see the letter of Moses b. Judah—the son-in-law of Abba-Mari's renowned ancestor, Meshullam b. Jacob de Lunel—preserved in Abraham b. David's responsa, *Temim De'im* (Warsaw, 1897), 7.

<sup>9</sup> The details of the legend vary, but generally present the Carolingians as having established a hereditary political office to govern the Jewish community, with the first potentate being of Davidic origin. For a critical analysis of this legend, see Jeremy Cohen, "The Nasi of Narbonne: A Problem in Medieval Jewish Historiography," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 2 (1977): 45-76; for a more programmatic summary of the legend, see Arthur J. Zuckerman, *A Jewish Principedom in Feudal France, 768-900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 74-101. See also Aryeh Grabois, "Le 'roi juif' de Narbonne," *Annales du Midi* 218 (1997): 165-88; and *idem.*, "The Nesiim of Narbonne: On the Image and Nature of Jewish Leadership in Southern France in the Middle Ages" [Hebrew], *Michael* 12 (1991): 43-66; and Ben-Zion Benedikt, *The Center of Torah Study in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1985), 2-7. On the Lunel academy, see Grabois' "Les écoles de Narbonne au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc, XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle—début XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, edited by Marie-Humbert Vicaire and Bernhard Blumenkranz, 141-57 (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1977); and Benedikt, *Torah Study in Provence*, 7-12.

<sup>10</sup> On the vibrancy of newer Occitan communities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Richard W. Emery, *The Jews of Perpignan in the Thirteenth Century: An Economic Study Based on Notarial Records* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Carol Iancu and Gérard Gahon, eds., *Les juifs à Montpellier et dans le Languedoc à travers l'histoire du moyen âge à nos jours* (Montpellier: Centre de Recherches et d'Études Juives et Hébraïques, 1988) and Michael Iancu, "Montpellier in Languedoc throughout the Centuries: A 'Little Cordoba'?" *Studia Hebraica* 7 (2007): 154-161.

authority of the cultural epicenter of northern Iberia, Abba-Mari was an average aristocrat from one of cluster of important communities.<sup>11</sup>

The question which burdened Abba-Mari was, so it appeared to his addressee, lame. How is it possible, Abba-Mari wanted to know, that the widespread use of astrological talismans for medical healing was openly tolerated? Was this not overt paganism? Ibn Adret responded with the respect due a fellow aristocrat, though with barely disguised annoyance. Not only had he written a responsum about this question already, which he had circulated in Occitania, but the answer was

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<sup>11</sup> There is evidence that Abba-Mari was counting on family relationships in Catalonia to secure the approval of Ibn Adret and the community for his efforts to limit philosophical study. Ibn Adret himself points to his common ancestry with Abba-Mari in a letter he wrote to the Montpellier opponents of the ban in defense of his pro-ban efforts: of Abba-Mari, he writes, “Surely an aristocrat in our faction (*‘edah*) is esteemed among the inheritors of the tradition for instruction and for testimony. We are familiar with him, and our forefathers are of the same origin and birth” (MQp 27, p. 74 / MQd 46, p. 450, ll. 26-28). Little is known about Ibn Adret’s immediate family—he rarely mentions his father, active as a moneylender, or brother in his works—but the Ibn Adret family is well attested in Catalonia, so it is likely that if Ibn Adret was indeed literally related to Abba-Mari, it was through Ibn Adret’s mother’s side of the family. In addition, several signatories from Barcelona have the rare name “Abba-Mari” as part of their names, possibly indicating family ties there for Abba-Mari b. Moses that might have encouraged him to contact Barcelona. (These include: (1) Abba-Mari b. Hanokh ha-Kohen, whose signature appears twice, in MQd 99, p. 725, l. 39 [entire text of MQp ps-80 absent; see appendix] and in MQd 100, p. 732, l. 103 [absent from the list of signatories in MQp 81(a)]; (2) Abba-Mari b. Isaac ha-Levi, whose signature appears twice, in MQp 83, p. 157, [absent from MQd 101] and in MQd 104, p. 751, apparatus criticus [absent from MQp 85]; (3) Abba-Mari b. Isaac b. Meshullam, whose signature appears three times, in MQd 99, p. 725, ll. 31-32 [entire text of MQp ps-80 absent], in MQd 100, p. 732, l. 102 [absent from MQp 81(a)], and in MQd 101, p. 738, l. 88 [absent from MQp 83, p. 157]; (4) Abba-Mari b. Makhir, whose signature appears once, in MQd 101, p. 738, l. 91 [absent from MQp 83, p. 157]; and (5) Makhir b. Abba-Mari, whose signature appears once, MQd 38, p. 414, l. 78 [absent from MQp 20, p. 61]. The latter two are almost certainly father and son, respectively.) In addition, through his relationship to Todros ha-Nasi b. Qalonymos, Abba-Mari had ties to Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi (Escapat Melit), a member of the notable Levite family of Barcelona, who was married to Todros’ sister: in the headnote to a letter written by Moses (“Don Escapat Melit ha-Levi”) preserved in the Parma manuscript of *Minḥat Qena’ot* and first published in *Israelietische Letterbode* 4 (1878-1879), 160-162, Abba-Mari describes Todros (“Don Mumit who lives in Narbonne”) as the brother-in-law (*gis*) of Moses. This letter is also published in Dimitrovsky’s edition, MQd \*121, pp. 842-844. The relationship is remarked upon by Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:443, n. 60 and Ben-Shalom, “Communication and Propaganda,” 221.

obvious: the Talmud permitted such remedies for the purposes of preserving life and well-being.<sup>12</sup>

Ibn Adret, however, had miscalculated Abba-Mari's motives. Abba-Mari was not, in fact, asking a *she'elah*, an official query of an authority of the law; this was merely a tactic to involve Ibn Adret by soliciting his response to the halakhic matter of the permissibility of using medical talismans.

Abba-Mari was not, in the end, primarily concerned with stopping the use of such cures, but rather with cutting off access to the source-material that fed the intellectual climate that allowed talismans to proliferate. His tactic, then, was calculated to lure the Barcelonan master—successfully, it turned out—into a cultural debate that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, has yet to abate: the question of how to integrate the truths derived from human reason with those of the Jewish tradition.

Abba-Mari was not the first to stir this pot. The medieval incarnations of this question, which took the dramatic form of heated, communal debate preserved in various texts, often letters, began in the late twelfth century following the circulation of Maimonides' works, particularly *Sefer ha-Madda'* and *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (*Dalalat al-Hā'irīn*).<sup>13</sup> There were debates in the East and in the West; there were localized controversies and international affairs; bans were instituted and individuals excommunicated. The most well-known and studied of the controversies took place in

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<sup>12</sup> MQp 3 / MQd 21, pp. 281-282, ll. 9-18. Ibn Adret mentions other stipulations on forms drawn for use as remedies here.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict on the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport: Bayard, 1935. Reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1970), 14-72; Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 41-135; Sarah Stroumsa, *The Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East: Yosef Ibn Shim'on's Silencing Epistle Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1999), v-xvii; and Bernard Septimus, "Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, edited by Isadore Twersky, 196-230 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

the 1230s and ended promptly when its participants were sobered by reports of the burning of the *Moreh*, probably at the hands of mendicants, and likely in Montpellier.<sup>14</sup> Occitania and its Jews were the epicenter of the controversies time and again, and Abba-Mari would be accused of reignited long-smoldering flames.<sup>15</sup> A naïf he was not. Abba-Mari's seemingly pedantic overture was, in reality, a barbed hook calculated to elicit a ruling in favor of Jerusalem over Athens, the latter being the direction which, Abba-Mari suspected, Jewry was marching.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> There are six extant sources attesting to this event, summarized by Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:400-402. The most well-known are the account of Maimonides' son, Abraham Maimuni (1186-1237), in his apologetic *Milhamot 'Adonai* and the letter of Hillel b. Samuel of Verona (c. 1220-c. 1295), who was involved in the controversy of 1289-1290 which ended with the excommunication of the Occitan Solomon Petit. However, it is a letter from David Qimḥi to Judah Ibn al-Fakhār, who provides the most detailed (and, in the opinion of Baer, most reliable) account of the turning over of *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* and *Sefer ha-Madda* to two several different groups of Christians: the "הדורשים הם"; "הפרידיקאדוריים"; and the "כמרים הגלחים". Finally, the matter reached a cardinal ("הקרדינאלי"), possibly Cardinal Romanus, who in 1233 was in Montpellier as the papal legate tasked with conducting the inquest against the Cathars. Qimḥi's letter is printed in קובץ תשובות הרמב"ם ואגרותיו, edited by Abraham Lichtenberg (Leipzig, 1859; Reprint, Farnborough, Eng., 1969), sec. III, אגרות קנאות, 4a-4b. Abraham Maimuni's account, which mentions that he was not informed of the event until 1235, is much more general; it is also printed in קובץ תשובות הרמב"ם ואגרותיו, sec. III, אגרות קנאות, 17a, and appears in his מלחמות ה' (Vilna, 1821), 12. Hillel's account, written some sixty years after the events apparently took place, may have conflated the burnings with the 1242 Paris burning of the Talmud; it is also preserved in קובץ תשובות הרמב"ם ואגרותיו, sec. III, אגרות קנאות, 13b-15a. For a summary of the events leading up to the book burnings, see Baer, 1:96-110; Sarachek, 73-88; and Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 84-86.

<sup>15</sup> MQd 52.1, p. 473, ll. 54-56 [text absent in MQp].

<sup>16</sup> In fact, Abba-Mari repeated this process—successfully—when he aimed to involve Asher b. Yeḥiel (the Rosh, c. 1250-1327). See below for further discussion; Abba-Mari's initial contact with Asher b. Yeḥiel occurs in MQp 50, pp. 108-109 / MQd 69, pp. 587-590, ll. 106-152, for, and Asher's response is contained in the following letter, MQp 51 / MQd 70.



ABBA-MARI AND THE INCEPTION OF THE CONTROVERSY (MQP 1-9 / MQD 19-27)

Considering his moderateness, his openness to philosophical writing, and his gentlemanly education in the rationalistic Occitan curriculum, it seems perplexing that Abba-Mari should be the one to instigate a controversy surrounding philosophy. His practiced ability to cite biblical and rabbinic texts is *de rigueur*, and his halakhic discussions with Ibn Adret and Asher b. Yeḥiel demonstrate his skill as an interpreter of the law.<sup>17</sup> His command of *melizah* is likewise befitting an educated man; Abba-Mari composed several known piyyutim, including a *qinah* for the Ninth of Av, and authored a short commentary on a Purim song by Isaac Ibn Ghiyāth.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, his magnum opus, in terms of intellectual expression, is the theological introduction in eighteen brief chapters that precedes the collected letters of *Minḥat Qena'ot*, along with the eponymously titled *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, a “position paper” he penned for the use of proponents of banning underage study of philosophy which is included in his compilation.<sup>19</sup> The theological introduction is, in fact, the

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Abba-Mari and Ibn Adret's exchange about mixtures (תערובות) (MQp 6, pp. 37-39 / MQd 24, pp. 333-339 and MQp 8, pp. 42-44 / MQd 26, pp. 349-358) and Abba-Mari and Asher b. Yeḥiel's exchange about tithing from a rooftop vineyard (MQp 50, pp. 106-109 / MQd 69, pp. 580-590 and MQp 51, pp. 109-110 / MQd 70, pp. 590-595, preserved in the Asher b. Yehiel's responsa, no. 24).

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Freimann and Dov Schwartz, “Abba Mari ben Moses ben Joseph Astruc of Lunel,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 1:230. Among the piyyutim is an elegy written after the death of Ibn Adret in 1310: see Ernest Renan, *Les rabbins français du commencement du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Histoire littéraire de la France, vol. 27 (Paris, 1877), 649. See also the poems cited by Zunz, *Die Literaturgeschichte der Synagogalen Poesie*, 498, 537; and Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Medieval Hebrew Poetry*, 4 vols. (New York, 1924-1933; reprint, 2nd ed., New York, 1970), 1:7, no. 121 and 1:115, no. 2429. As mentioned above, one poem, a *qinah* for the Ninth of 'Av, was published by S. D. Luzzato in *Kerem Hemed* 4 (1839): 30-31, and another, a commentary in Aramaic on a Purim poem by Isaac Ibn Ghiyyat, appears in Luzzato's *Nahlat Shaddal* 2 (1879): 4. These poems, the commentary, and several letters are all of Abba-Mari's surviving works apart from *Minḥat Qena'ot*.

<sup>19</sup> On the usage of *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, see Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 159-161 and “Menaḥem ha-Me'iri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995), 138-141.

first known attempt to delineate principles of belief in Judaism following Maimonides' Thirteen Principles.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Abba-Mari turned to the philosophical treatise as a matter of course when organizing and expressing his thoughts on the matters at stake in the debate.

It is possible that Abba-Mari was merely representative of a moderately conservative strain running through the predominant rationalistic culture of fourteenth-century Occitania, but his bold outreach to Ibn Adret, assertive public campaign, and self-described zeal point to his deep convictions on the subject. In spite of the myriad socio-political motivations that can be posited for Abba-Mari's actions, the plain fact is that this comfortable aristocrat took up the cudgel on behalf of a worldview which he believed to be under threat by rational philosophy of Greek origin.<sup>21</sup> Without impugning philosophy altogether, he argued that its free exchange was wrecking havoc in his community and causing people to misunderstand revealed truths preserved in the Jewish tradition, a road that could only end with antinomian behavior born of ignorance. However moderate he was, Abba-Mari's idealism turned him into an activist of unusual intensity.

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<sup>20</sup> Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 69-74; Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Oxford and Portland, Ore.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 17-21. In addition to his letters and notes in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, Abba-Mari wrote one that is not preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* but is instead preserved in manuscript: Vatican Ms. Ebr. 256 includes a letter by Abba-Mari described in the manuscript thus: כתב שלח אבא מרי ב"ר משה ב"ר יוסף לרשב"א על הויכוח על כתבי הרמב"ם. Several of Abba-Mari's letters from *Minḥat Qena'ot* are also preserved in parallel elsewhere: in Ibn Adret's responsa, volume 1, no. 167, 825, in conjunction with no. 413, 424-428; and in Asher b. Yehiel's responsa, no. 24.

<sup>21</sup> On socio-political dimensions of the controversy, see Marc Saperstein, "The Conflict over the Rashba's Ḥerem on Philosophical Study: A Political Perspective," *Jewish History* 1 (1986): 27-38; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Between Abba Mari and the Rashba: The Negotiations Which Preceded the Ban in Barcelona," in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 3, edited by B. Oded, Zvi Avneri, Akiba Gilboa and Uriel Rappaport, 121-137 (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1974); and Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 23-71.



There is little other surviving information about this man who instigated the greatest controversy of his time. Abba-Mari apparently made a living, at least in part, by operating a vineyard: he remarks at one point to Moses b. Samuel about the imposition of the grape harvest (*tirdat ha-bazir*) on his campaign for the ban.<sup>22</sup> Few details about Abba-Mari's immediate family are known; he does not directly mention his father, Moses b. Joseph ha-Yarhi, or his own sons. Both Jacob b. Makhir Ibn Tibbon (Profatius Judaeus/Don Profet Tibbon de Marseilles, c. 1236-1306) and Ibn Adret, who would become the senior leaders of the two factions that formed in the wake of the ban proposal, mention pointedly that they share a common ancestry with Abba-Mari.<sup>23</sup> Ben Makhir identifies his common origin with Abba-Mari as descendents of Meshullam b. Jacob de Lunel (Rabbenu Meshullam, d. c. 1170), whom Benjamin of Tudela met there in 1165:<sup>24</sup>

That scholar [Abba-Mari] who has drawn your attention to the matter ought to remember that his forefathers and my forefathers are our elders, and our master, the great teacher

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<sup>22</sup> MQp 19, p. 59 / MQd 37, p. 408, l. 53. On the relationship between Moses and Abba-Mari, see below.

<sup>23</sup> For Ibn Adret's statement, see MQp 27, p. 74 / MQd 46, p. 450, ll. 26-28. For more on this familial connection and its possible effect on the controversy, see the Introduction. For Jacob b. Makhir's statement, see MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, p. 509, ll. 45-46. Ben Makhir emphasized his and Abba-Mari's common ancestry as a means of criticizing Abba-Mari's actions as an affront to the proud tradition of Occitan Jewry, peppered as it was with scholars from their common family line.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus Nathan Adler, ed., *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation, and Commentary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), Heb. sec., 4. Meshullam was Ben Makhir's great-great grandfather through the latter's mother's side (because Ben Makhir's father is Makhir b. Samuel Ibn Tibbon); Meshullam's daughter was Ben Makhir's great-grandmother. The exact genealogical connection between Meshullam and Abba-Mari is less clear.

Leopold Zunz identifies one possible reference Abba-Mari made to his grandfather, Joseph, in his piyyut *אחור על דל מהלל ולא אחדל*, published by S. D. Luzzato in the periodical *Kerem Hemed* 4 (1839): 30-31, l. 23; see Zunz, *Die Literaturgeschichte der Synagogalen Poesie* (Berlin, 1865), 537 (Zunz identifies Joseph as Abba-Mari's father).

Rabbeinu Meshullam, and his sons and sons-in-law, were the nobility of the land [Occitania] and pillars of the world.<sup>25</sup>

“Rabbeinu Meshullam” was the founder of the famed Lunel academy and patron of translations of philosophy including the *Hovot ha-Levavot* (*Kitāb al-Hidāyah ‘ilā Fara’id al-Qulūb*) of Bahye’ b. Joseph Ibn Paqudah; his five sons, Joseph, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Asher “the hermit” (*ha-parush*), were instrumental in shaping the character of twelfth-century Occitania. In fact, through Rabbenu Meshullam, Abba-Mari was distantly related not only to the Tibbonides, but also to the esteemed Lattes family (which would remain prominent into the twentieth century).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Abba-Mari also had connections to the “princely” Qalonymides of southern France.<sup>27</sup> This background

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<sup>25</sup> MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, p. 509, ll. 45-46.

<sup>26</sup> Rabbenu Meshullam’s great-granddaughter (Ben Makir’s maternal aunt) is known to have married a Lattes, either Elijah b. Isaac Lattes (fl. first half of the thirteenth century) or his son Jacob (fl. thirteenth century). See Israel Ta-Shma, “Meshullam ben Moshe” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 14:78; and *idem.*, “Lattes, Judah,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 12:519.

<sup>27</sup> Qalonymos b. Todros ha-Nasi de Narbonne (c. second half of the thirteenth century) was apparently Abba-Mari’s uncle (MQp 53, pp. 115-115 / MQd 72, p. 612, ll. 139-142). Ram Ben-Shalom notes this also in “Communication and Propaganda Between Provence and Spain: The Controversy over Extreme Allegorization (1303-1306),” in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: The Pre-Modern World*, edited by Sophia Menache, 171-225 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 220-221. This Qalonymos was also a common relation between Abba-Mari and Todros ha-Nasi b. Qalonymos of Narbonne (fl. c. 1300), as well as Todros and Jacob b. Judah de Bilqieri of Montpellier, the latter’s son also being married to a daughter of Abba-Mari. Indeed, in a response to Todros ha-Nasi’s criticism of him (discussed below), Abba-Mari alludes to his personal friendship family ties to Todros ha-Nasi. The opening of Abba-Mari’s response to Todros is unusually direct and personal, even emotional; he seems obviously distressed by Todros’s (perceived) cold shoulder and apologizes profusely.

In addition, it appears that Abba-Mari’s most strident critic in Montpellier, Shelemiah/Solomon b. Isaac b. Abba-Mari “ha-Nesiah” (or “ha-Nasi”) de Lunel of Montpellier (fl. c. 1300), was related to him. Shelemiah always includes his paternal grandfather Abba-Mari in his patronymic when signing his name; beyond this, both Ibn Adret and Abba-Mari address one another with relative certainty as an assumed ally.

There are a few more possibilities, based on patronymics (on which see the Introduction), for Abba-Mari’s prominent relations. One possibility is the Anatoli family, including Jacob b. Abba-Mari b. Samson

was an asset to Abba-Mari: the fact that one of Abba-Mari's sons married the daughter of Moses b. Samuel b. Asher, a fellow aristocrat from Perpignan, demonstrates the high status of his family at the turn of the fourteenth century.<sup>28</sup> He was, in short, a typical Occitan aristocrat of moderate to high standing, possessing the requisite education and wealth to be able to participate in the controversy.

Ibn Adret did not share Abba-Mari's concerns or convictions at the outset of the debate, but after overcoming his initial reluctance, he admitted to Abba-Mari that he, too, had a bad feeling about philosophy. "You now take me by the nape (*'ophez be-'orpi*) so as to drag out of me what my heart does not desire to delve into (*mah sh-'ein libi hofez bo*)," Ibn Adret writes to Abba-Mari in his initial response, but continues, "But what can I do, your passion and virtue have incited (*hesitu*) me to explore elusive wisdom."<sup>29</sup> Ibn Adret admits that he finds aspects of *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* and *Sefer ha-Madda* perplexing, especially because Maimonides' own writing is contradictory on the matter of foreign wisdom.<sup>30</sup> In his second response to Abba-Mari, Ibn Adret is still conflicted ("I had very much decided not to reply to the matters you addressed to me") but

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Anatoli (c. 1194-1256), author the *Malmad ba-Talmidim* (who was married to Ben Makhir's paternal aunt); this is presumed not only because Jacob Anatoli's father is named Abba-Mari b. Samson, but because a common ancestor is known to link Isaac b. Abba-Mari de Marseilles (c. 1120-c. 1190) to Anatoli b. Joseph de Marseilles (fl. late twelfth century), the earliest known Anatoli and a *dayyan* in Ayyūb (Alexandria) at the time Maimonides arrived there: namely, Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi (de Lunel, c. 1155-1215), author of the *Sefer ha-Manhig* preserving the customs of the Occitan and French communities, who was active in Avignon, Lunel, Dampierre, and Toledo. Another possible relation to Joseph b. Abba-Mari Ibn Kaspi (En Bonafoux del'Argentièrre, c. 1279-c. 1340), author of numerous philosophical treatises.

<sup>28</sup> See above.

<sup>29</sup> MQp 3, p. 23 / MQd 21, p. 281, ll. 4-8.

<sup>30</sup> MQp 7, p. 41 / MQ d 25, p. 347, ll. 89-95.

ends on a decisive note, stating that he has more objections than the few that he has raised (*ve-dai li 'atab 'im ha-remizut bilvad*).<sup>31</sup> He would hesitate no longer.

#### IBN ADRET INVESTIGATES ABBA-MARI'S CLAIMS (MQP 10-17 /MQD 28-35)

Ibn Adret went quickly from skeptic to activist: after dispatching a second packet of letters to Abba-Mari, he began to investigate whether Abba-Mari's claims had any truth, pressing his associates for information about transgressive behavior in Occitania. His first move was to contact a reliable colleague in Perpignan, requesting a report on the activities of the philosophically-minded there. This colleague was Crescas Vidal, and it is easy to see why Ibn Adret chose him to be his source in Perpignan. Crescas was a recent transplant to Perpignan, a city located approximately halfway between Barcelona and Montpellier, but whose self-perception was generally Occitan;<sup>32</sup> yet Crescas was originally a Barcelonan, a member of the distinguished Vidal family who had studied under Aaron b. Joseph ha-Levi (Rah, c. 1235-c. 1300), Aaron being a colleague of Ibn Adret since their days as pupils of Nahmanides.<sup>33</sup> As such, Crescas was a man of undeniable loyalty ideally placed to report on the situation in Occitania from the perspective of a Catalan. Furthermore, Crescas' brother Bonafos Vidal (fl. c. 1300) was living in Barcelona, at Ibn Adret's disposal. Both

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<sup>31</sup> MQp 7, p. 41 / MQ d 25, p. 347, l. 88; MQp 7, p. 42 / MQ d 25, p. 348, l. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Richard W. Emery, *The Jews of Perpignan in the Thirteenth Century*, 1-10.

<sup>33</sup> Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:292, 442 (n. 45). Baer suggests that the father of Crescas and his brother Bonafos was Vidal Solomon, bailiff to James I of Aragon. As he notes, Crescas is mentioned in Jean Régné, *History of the Jews in Aragon: Regesta and Documents, 1213-1327*, edited by Yom Tov Assis (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), nos. 2344, 2416, and, along with his brother, 1932; Bonafos is also mentioned in nos. 1634, 1709, 1932, 2034, 2048, 2122, and 2330. These documents place Crescas in Barcelona at least until 1291. See also Israel Ta-Shma, "Vidal, Crescas," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 20:516.

brothers, whose relationship was close, readily obliged Ibn Adret.<sup>34</sup> Bonafos wrote to Crescas in concert with Ibn Adret, encouraging his brother to become Ibn Adret's operative in Perpignan.<sup>35</sup> Crescas replied to Barcelona with an epoch-making response.

Crescas Vidal's response itself was in general nuanced and responsible rather than absolute and alarmist, apart from one serious accusation: Crescas identified Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim (c. 1245-c. 1315) as the provocateur that Ibn Adret was asking about. Levi was the only person accused by name of ideational transgression in the course of the controversy, and he has remained an icon of medieval Jewish "heresy" in subsequent literature. Levi was, in actuality, identified as such due to a misunderstanding on the part of Crescas. Until he received the letters from Bonafos and Ibn Adret, Crescas was not aware of any wrongdoing in Perpignan, he writes.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Crescas misread the question and sought out a problematic individual fitting the description in the letters from Barcelona; the inquiry letter was not asking about the transgressions of an individual, but about transgressive ideas being passed around the community by *darshanim* and teachers. Levi aptly fit the description, so Crescas identified him as the troublemaker. This designation led to a flurry of letters between Barcelona and Perpignan, as Levi and the man in whose home he was living, Samuel ha-Sulami (d'Escalita/de l'Escalette, fl. c. 1300), wrote apologetic letters to Ibn

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<sup>34</sup> The brothers' closeness is indicated by the affection the express towards one another in their letters, beyond that required by letter-writing conventions.

<sup>35</sup> MQp 11, pp. 45-46 / MQd 29, pp. 362-365.

<sup>36</sup> Compare Crescas' report about Levi in MQp 12, p. 47 / MQd 30, p. 369, ll. 55-62 to Bonafos's query in MQp 11, p. 46 / MQd 29, p. 364, ll. 25-32. The incidental targeting of Levi is examined in detail in Chapter 5.

Adret to which the latter hastily replied.<sup>37</sup> Levi was ostracized but never persecuted, and remained a source of ire and exemplar of the ideational transgressor for ban proponents.

THE PUBLIC LAUNCH OF THE CONTROVERSY (MQP 18-22 / MQD 36-40)

Crescas' accusations against Levi, and, by association, against Samuel ha-Sulami, caused an outcry in Perpignan even before the public launch of the controversy, and transgressive ideation became a matter of communal discussion. Moses b. Samuel b. Asher (whose daughter was married to Abba-Mari's son Meshullam, as discussed above) wrote to Abba-Mari to apprise him of the tensions mounting in Perpignan. Moses describes acrimony in the community and the formation of factional divisions among aristocrats.<sup>38</sup> Moses' letter reached Abba-Mari on 29 Elul (31 August 1304), and in the days between Rosh ha-Shannah and Yom Kippur, Abba-Mari dispatched an apologetic letter in return, asking Moses to convey his regrets personally to the offended *nikhbadim*.<sup>39</sup> Still, while Abba-Mari was sufficiently chastened that he mustered up a blustery defense of the excellence of the Perpignan *qahal* and an obsequious and dissembling apology, he

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<sup>37</sup> On ha-Sulami, see Heinrich Gross, *Gallia Judaica: dictionnaire géographique de la France d'après les sources rabbiniques*, (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897; Reprint, with supplementary material by Simon Schwartzfuchs, Philo Press, 1969), 430-431, and Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:292. Gross identifies ha-Sulami in a manuscript dated 1255, which suggests that he was born around 1235, making him a contemporary of Ibn Adret and Jacob b. Makhir. L'Escalita is, most likely, present-day Pégairolles-de-L'Escalette, an Occitan town approximately sixty kilometers northwest of Montpellier.

<sup>38</sup> MQp 18, pp. 57-58 / MQd 36, pp. 399-404.

<sup>39</sup> Abba-Mari reports that Moses' letter arrived on 29 Elul (which must be in 1304, so, on 31 August) in MQp 19, p. 59 / MQd 37, p. 407, l. 28. In this letter of response to Moses, Abba-Mari also makes reference to the upcoming Yom Kippur (ll. 35-36), indicating that he penned it between Rosh ha-Shannah and Yom Kippur. For the equivalencies, see Eduard Mahler, *Handbuch der jüdischen Chronologie* (Leipzig, 1916; Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 568-569.

remained undaunted: in the closing of his apology, he encouraged Moses to form a union (*'agudah*) to advance what he assumed to be their shared objectives.

It was at this point that Ibn Adret made his first public move, sending a communal letter, signed by a representative sixteen Barcelona aristocrats as well as himself, to “the holy community of Montpellier,” stating the gravity of offenses perpetuated in public allegorical sermons and by teachers of philosophical ideas. It was the first such public letter addressed to a *qahal*, and as such represents the inception of the controversy as a public affair. Such group letters—letters written on behalf of a collective, signed by its leading members, and addressed to the whole of a community—had to be sent to an individual member of the addressed community as a practical measure; the person who received the letter would then publicize it, often by declaiming its contents in the synagogue on an occasion when much of the public congregated there.<sup>40</sup> In this case, Ibn Adret instructed the courier to bring the letter to Abba-Mari and Todros b. Judah de Bilqieri (i.e., de Beaucaire, or Belcaire in Occitan, fl. c. 1300) who were to preview it and, if they found its contents potentially congenial to the *qahal*, to publicize it. Todros was likely chosen because he was known to be sympathetic to the cause and stood out as a senior member of the Montpellier *qahal*; he was also a relative of Abba-Mari.<sup>41</sup> Todros would be active in promoting the ban until his death, whereupon his activities were taken over by his brother Jacob. Ibn Adret’s instructions were a touch devious: since the letter was addressed to the collective, it should not properly have been opened until the community was assembled to hear it, and Abba-Mari and Todros were hesitant to

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<sup>40</sup> On the significance of public letters and their modes of circulation, see Chapter 2.

<sup>41</sup> See above; Todros’ brother Jacob b. Judah de Bilqieri had a son who was married to a daughter of Abba-Mari.

open it.<sup>42</sup> With great care to adhere to the halakhah governing the situation, they went on to do so, after which they convened a public meeting (*ma'amad*) to read the letter aloud.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the *ma'amad* convened by Abba-Mari and Todros de Bilqieri, word was circulating in Montpellier about the contents of the Barcelona letter, prompting the elderly and ailing Jacob b. Makhir to call Abba-Mari to his bedside. Ben Makhir, as the grandson of Samuel b. Judah Ibn Tibbon, was renowned for carrying the Tibbonide philosophical tradition, which had profoundly shaped Occitan Jewish culture, into the fourth generation. Ben Makhir translated ancient and contemporary works from Latin as well as Arabic; he is also known for his invention of an astronomical instrument, the *Rov'ab Yisra'el* or *Quadrans novus*, which improved significantly upon the astrolabe.<sup>44</sup> So when Ben Makhir summoned Abba-Mari, it was a public event of significance: the senior *nikhbad* was going on the record as opposing the suggestions of Barcelona that a ban be instituted against the underage study of philosophy.

As it turned out, Ben Makhir recovered in time to attend the meeting, spoke publicly against the ban proposal, and became the de facto leader of a faction of aristocrats (*'agudah*, in

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<sup>42</sup> On this strategy, and the halakhah surrounding the opening of letters addressed to a collective, see Chapter 2.

<sup>43</sup> MQp 21, p. 61-62 / MQd 39, p. 415, ll. 13-15.

<sup>44</sup> James T. Robinson, "The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval 'Provence,'" in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 193-224 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 222-223. In addition to carrying on this Maimonidean-rationalistic legacy, Ben Makhir had deep roots within Occitania stretching back to before the Tibbonide migration from Granada into the south of France (discussed above in the context of his common relation, Abba-Mari): on his mother's side, Ben Makhir was descended from the aforementioned Occitan great Meshullam b. Jacob de Lunel (the common ancestor between him and Abba-Mari), and his paternal aunt had married into the Occitan Anatoli family.



Abba-Mari's terminology) opposing that institution of such legislation in Montpellier. It is unclear to what extent Ben Makhir's illness and recovery were political machinations; even Abba-Mari does not imply this, probably because he wishes to avoid accusations of impropriety and, especially, blame for dividing the community, of which he had been accused in Perpignan. What Abba-Mari does seek, in his recounting of the events, is to depict the community as unanimously in support of the proposals made by Barcelona until Ben Makhir arrived on the scene and "spoke provocatively" (*dibber be-qantoria*).<sup>45</sup> To this end he presents Ben Makhir as a bellicose figure responsible for the acrimony surrounding the ban, which Abba-Mari regards as a moderate, appropriate, even innocuous response to the situation.

A DEFENSE OF RATIONALISM (MQP 23-43 / MQD 41/42-62)

Ben Makhir and his supporters hastened to address Barcelona directly with their concerns, dispatching a letter in defense of the integrity of the Occitan tradition of philosophical study alongside Talmudic learning. This letter is, in fact, one of only two written by Montpellier ban opponents that is preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot*; at the close of his compilation, Abba-Mari pledges to collect the letters of his opponents in a similar anthology representing the other side, a task which he never completed, so that this letter is among the sole representations of the views of the ban opponents in their own words.<sup>46</sup> In it, the ban opponents immediately protest that the earlier

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<sup>45</sup> MQp 21, p. 62 / MQd 39, p. 418, ll. 56-58.

<sup>46</sup> The ban opponents' communal letter is MQp 24, pp. 66-68 / MQd 43, pp. 431-440. (The other letter preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* that is written by a ban opponent is Ben Makhir's letter to Ibn Adret, MQp 39, pp. 84-86 / MQd 58, pp. 506-513.) Abba-Mari's pledge to copy the remainder is found in MQp 97, pp. 176-177 / MQd 117, pp. 824-825, ll. 1-8. Others extant writings by ban opponents that are not included in

*milḥamah shel miṣvah ve-shel reshut*—that is, the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s—is being reignited by Abba-Mari and his supporters.<sup>47</sup> Their letter professes surprise at Ibn Adret’s involvement and especially his support for Abba-Mari’s cause, when they view their perspective as akin to Ibn Adret’s. The ban opponents furthermore assert their powers of discernment, punctiliousness in matters of ritual observance, and venerable history of honoring the best of rational knowledge alongside revealed wisdom; after all, they note, all truth derives from the Sinaitic revelation. The more sober response of the ban opponents came from Jacob b. Makhir, who wrote directly to his colleague Ibn Adret, setting out in a lengthy letter why Ibn Adret’s involvement was unwarranted.<sup>48</sup> While Ben Makhir acknowledges that there are “things that tend towards heresy in the books of the Greeks,” but is quick to assert that it is possible to take what is useful from them without compromising Judaism.<sup>49</sup> He notes that there is no rabbinic source for a ban against philosophy and that the study of nature is traditional, including talmudic sages among its practitioners.<sup>50</sup> Using strong language, Ben Makhir tells Ibn Adret that if he should disagree

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*Minḥat Qena’ot* are the extracts cited from a letter of Menahem ha-Me’iri preserved in a letter of ban supporter Simon b. Joseph de Lunel, published by David Kaufmann, “Simeon b. Josefs Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdischen Exegese und Predigt im Mittelalter,” in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz*, Heb. sec., 143-151 (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884. Reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1974); and Yedaiah ha-Penini’s *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut*, published in Ibn Adret’s responsa (Vol. 1, no. 418) and subsequently in Lemberg (Lvov) in 1809 and in *Kokebe Yizḥaq* 5 (1846-1869): 12-17.

<sup>47</sup> MQp 24, p. 66 / MQd 43, pp. 431-432, ll. 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> MQp 39, pp. 84-86 / MQd 58, pp. 506-513.

<sup>49</sup> “יש בספרי היונים דברים הנוטים לדברי מינים,” MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, p. 510, l. 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> MQp 39, p. 84 / MQd 58, p. 507, l. 15.

with the allegorists' understanding of things, they will not consider him in the wrong; rather, his viewpoint will be accepted as one of the legitimate "seventy faces of the Torah."<sup>51</sup>

Ban proponents were quick to dispatch a counter-letter to Barcelona in an attempt to obviate the claims of their opponents, a strategy which ultimately back-fired. In this letter, ban proponents addressed many of the philosophical positions they viewed as problematic, including the eternalist view of the universe (*qadmut*), the denial of the reality of miracles (*mofetim*), and the limiting of divine providence (*hashgahah*).<sup>52</sup> Rather than serving to countermand their opponents, however, the effect of this letter was to clarify to the Barcelona elite just how divided on the question of rationalist philosophy the Montpellier community was. In effect, Ibn Adret and his supporters realized that they'd been misled by Abba-Mari into believing that the Montpellier *nikhbadim* were agreed that there was a problem with philosophical study in their locale. Realizing that the extent of the acrimony would surely not be lost on Barcelona, Abba-Mari personally sent two separate letters to Barcelona *nikhbadim* apologizing for his role in causing divisiveness in his community.<sup>53</sup> Barcelona proceeded to send a series of letters, both to the ban opponents and in response to Abba-Mari, intended to moderate the tenor of their earlier remarks on the matter of philosophical study.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, p. 508, ll. 31-24.

<sup>52</sup> MQp 23, p. 65 / MQd 41/42, p. 427, ll. 16-18.

<sup>53</sup> MQp 25, pp. 68-70 / MQd 44, pp. 440-444 and MQd 26, pp. 70-71 / MQd 45, pp. 444-448.

<sup>54</sup> MQp 28, pp. 73-74 / MQd 47, pp. 454-458; MQp 29, pp. 75-76 / MQd 48, pp. 461-466; and MQp 31, pp. 76-77 / MQd 50, pp. 466-468.

Ultimately, at the forefront of the clash in Montpellier were not Abba-Mari and Jacob b. Makhir, but Abba-Mari and one Shelemiah (or Solomon; both variations occur) b. Isaac b. Abba-Mari “ha-Nesiah” (or “ha-Nasi”) de Lunel (fl. c. 1300), who was initially outspoken in his opposition to the ban. Shelemiah and Abba-Mari appear to have quarreled publicly, causing great upset.<sup>55</sup> Like Ben Makhir, Shelemiah was likely a relative of Abba-Mari’s, adding perhaps to the anxiety engendered by the discord between them.<sup>56</sup> In an attempt to quiet the argument, Ibn Adret wrote directly to Shelemiah, sending him a typically equivocal letter. On the one hand, he assures

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<sup>55</sup> The events of the quarrel are recorded in a textually complex six-letter exchange, as Abba-Mari himself notes in the headnote to MQp 33, p. 78 / MQd 52.1, p. 470, ll. 1-8, explaining that two of the six letters are missing from *Minḥat Qena’ot*:

- (1) First, Ibn Adret reached out to Shelemiah (MQp 30, p.p. 75-76 / MQd 49, pp. 471-476); Abba-Mari identifies this letter by its incipit as the initial letter of the Ibn Adret-Shelemiah exchange.
- (2) Shelemiah responded to Ibn Adret, but this letter is not extant: it is the first of the two lost letters mentioned by Abba-Mari.
- (3) Ibn Adret sent a second letter to Ibn Adret, the second of the lost letters. However, Abba-Mari knows and records the incipit of this lost letter (MQd 52.1, p. 472, ll. 30-31 [text absent in MQp]). In fact, Abba-Mari was mistaken: he actually did possess a fragment of this letter, though he didn’t realize it as he was editing *Minḥat Qena’ot*. Identifiable by the incipit he himself cites, the second letter Ibn Adret wrote to Shelemiah is preserved in MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, pp. 358-359.
- (4) Shelemiah replied again to Abba-Mari (MQd 52.1, pp. 471-475, ll. 11-75 [text absent in MQp]).
- (5) Ibn Adret sent a third letter to Shelemiah (MQd 52.2, pp. 475-485, ll. 76-255 [text absent in MQp]).
- (6) Ibn Adret wrote to Abba-Mari informing him of the exchange (MQp 33, pp. 75-76 / MQd 52.3, pp. 485-487, ll. 256-285).

Our Shelemiah/Solomon de Lunel is probably to be identified with the Solomon b. Isaac de Lunel attested in an archival document which records he, among several others, had been commissioned to collect taxes levied by Philip IV of France in 1286 on Jews living in the jurisdiction of the seneschal of Carcassonne (Gustave Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc antérieurement au quatorzième siècle* [Paris: Picard, 1881; Reprint, Farnborough, Eng.: Gregg, 1971], 114; and Heinrich Gross, *Gallia Judaica* [Paris: L. Cerf, 1897; Reprint, with supplementary material by Simon Schwartzfuchs, Philo Press, 1969], 288).

<sup>56</sup> On the possible familial relationship between Abba-Mari and Shelemiah, see above.

Shelemiah deferentially, “It never occurred to us to adjudicate these matters in our own courts,” adding, “Your etiquette (*musar*) is not lacking, and where there is etiquette there is [also] wisdom,” he writes.”<sup>57</sup> He is not reticent in praising Shelemiah, nor in reprimanding Abba-Mari for allowing the disharmony between him and Shelemiah to spiral out of control; Ibn Adret placed the blame for the quarrel, it seems, on Abba-Mari. On the other hand, Ibn Adret maintains that the situation of philosophical study in the Occitan curriculum is a potentially dangerous one that he cannot ignore, even from his jurisdiction far beyond the borders of Montpellier. He presumes Shelemiah’s participation on behalf of the ban, closing the letter by asking Shelemiah to oversee the effort to institute the ban in his community.

Ibn Adret was not the only one concerned by the rift between Abba-Mari and Shelemiah; soon, the acrimony between proponents and opponents of the ban, represented by the feuding men, became the subject of discussion in all three communities (Barcelona, Perpignan, Montpellier), decisively establishing the controversy as a public affair. Abba-Mari’s relative, Moses b. Samuel b. Asher, appealed to Profiat Gracian (Samuel H̄en de Béziers) in Perpignan and Isaac b. Judah Lattes in Montpellier to bring Abba-Mari and Shelemiah to a reconciliation. These appeals to end the rift had two effects on the controversy. First, they placed Abba-Mari, Ibn Adret, and other supporters of a ban in a defensive position. Shelemiah, perhaps by virtue of his status as a *nikkbad*, was able to garner a great deal of support, as Moses b. Samuel b. Asher notes in a letter to Abba-Mari.<sup>58</sup> Isaac Lattes was similarly unmoved by the appeals despite his earlier gestures of

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<sup>57</sup> MQp 30, p. 76 / MQd 49, p. 464, ll. 37-38 and p. 465, l. 48.

<sup>58</sup> MQp 38, p. 83 / MQd 57, p. 503, ll. 30-32.

support for the ban, and instead gave his allegiance to the anti-ban party. The Barcelona *nikhbadim* had been blindsided by the strength of the opposition of Ben Makhir, Shelemiah, Lattes and others, having been led by Abba-Mari to believe that Montpellier was far more united in favor of philosophical study than it in fact was. Secondly and more significantly, so embroiled were the leaders of the three communities in the issue that had quietly troubled Abba-Mari that a controversy on a larger scale was inevitable. No longer was the matter to be quickly or quietly resolvable.

#### A POSITION PAPER FOR PROPONENTS OF THE BAN (MQP 44-59 / MQD 63-78)

Despite Ben Makhir's robust defense, letters began arriving at Ibn Adret's and Abba-Mari's doorsteps pledging their support: from Aix, written by Abraham b. Joseph b. Abraham Barukh b. Nuriah of Aix (fl. c. 1300) and his son Joseph Samuel; from the *nikhbadim* of Argentièrre; from the *nikhbadim* of Lunel; and from Asher b. Yehiel (the Rosh, c. 1250–1327) in Toledo. Emboldened, Ibn Adret urged Argentièrre as well as Montpellier to adopt a ban against the underage study of philosophy. Tellingly, it is at this point in the debate that Samuel b. Reuben de Bedersh (de Béziers, fl. c. 1300), a relative of Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim who took him in to his home in Montpellier, pledged his support to the ban proponents, even as he defended Levi from their charges. That Samuel b. Reuben would approach Ibn Adret in apology and with an offer of support demonstrates the rising power of pro-ban activities in Montpellier.

Nor was Samuel the only one to recover his support for the proposed ban: Qalonymos ha-Nasi b. Todros of Narbonne, who initially supported opponents of the ban, transferred his

allegiance to its proponents.<sup>59</sup> Abba-Mari had been surprised to learn that Qalonymos ha-Nasi had written words of disfavor about him in a letter to the Montpellier *qahal*, which is not preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot*. “We sat [studied] together in the house of our brother Meshullam; between us we knew what was right!” Abba-Mari writes back.<sup>60</sup> It may be that Abba-Mari overreacted, since Qalonymos, in his response, notes that he merely wrote a few hasty lines to the ban opponents while en route to Béziers; but in any case, Qalonymos ha-Nasi apologizes and pledges his support for the ban. In addition, Qalonymos ha-Nasi informs Abba-Mari that he has spoken to the “lion of the community,” apparently Profiat Gracian, about the matter and that the tide of opinion there is shifting to support for the ban.<sup>61</sup>

In light of this shift in the proponents’ favor, as well as the continuous discord over the ban proposal, Abba-Mari composed an essay (*ketav*) in fifteen chapters summarizing and solidifying the ideology underpinning the proponents’ activities, which, as noted above, Gregg Stern has aptly termed a “position paper” summarizing the views of ban proponents for the use of their supporters: “Abba Mari presents here his rationalist justification for the prohibition of philosophic study before physical and intellectual maturity.”<sup>62</sup> Though the essay is somewhat rarified in its subject matter, Abba-Mari apparently intended to beef up the pro-ban camp’s somewhat flimsy ideological defense

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<sup>59</sup> MQp 57, p. 121 / MQd 76, pp. 634-636. In addition, during this period of the exchange, Ibn Adret informed Abba-Mari of another Montpellier aristocrat who turned to him apologetically, declaring his support for the ban (MQp 49, p. 104 / MQd 68, pp. 575-576, ll. 2-7).

<sup>60</sup> MQp 56, p. 120 / MQd 75, p. 632, ll. 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> MQp 57, p. 121 / MQd 76, pp. 635, ll. 18-27.

<sup>62</sup> Stern, “Menaḥem ha-Me’iri,” 138. See also *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture*, 159-161.

of their proposal, which relied upon propagandistic “slogans” such as the oft-repeated rhyme, “they made Abraham and Sarah into Matter and Form.”<sup>63</sup> In concise and direct chapters, he laid out a theory of knowledge which, based on well-established precedent within the Jewish philosophical tradition, suggested that all knowledge, including rational knowledge, originated at Sinai and was possessed by the prophets, only to be lost in the exile of Israel from its land.<sup>64</sup> In his treatise, it is Aristotle who is singled out for incorrect beliefs—specifically, his denial of God’s knowledge of particulars—while Maimonides is defended and vindicated. Though others in the debate, such as Asher b. Yeḥiel, would have few qualms about seeking to limit access to Maimonides’ philosophical works within the parameters of the ban, Abba-Mari’s easy acceptance of Maimonides is more typical of the views of most ban proponents, for whom the debate about Maimonides himself was long dead.<sup>65</sup> Instead, their concern was centered on rationalist methodology and foreign philosophy unbound by Sinaitic revelation. Citing such greats as David Qimḥi, Samuel ha-Nagid (ha-Levi b. Joseph, Ismā‘īl Ibn Naghrīlah, 993–1055/6), and Hai b. Sherira Ga’on (939–1038), Abba-Mari maintains that, on the one hand, well-trained minds are easily able to discard the proverbial chaff from the wheat of foreign philosophy, while, on the other hand, maintaining that it has the potential to cause transgression of Torah law.

Abba-Mari never heard back from Barcelona concerning his *Sefer ha-Yare’ah*, the title he had chosen for the position paper he had written for the use of his compatriots. Autumn had

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<sup>63</sup> For a detailed examination of this and other slogans, see Chapter 4.

<sup>64</sup> This theory is discussed further in Chapter 3.

<sup>65</sup> For Asher b. Yeḥiel’s views, see MQp 51, pp. 109–110 / MQd 70, pp. 590–595 and MQp 52, pp. 595–598 / MQd 71, pp. 595–598.



turned into winter and the elderly Ibn Adret lay ill in Barcelona. Having heard nothing from Barcelona since Sukkot, Abba-Mari dispatched a trusted *nikhbad* to speak with Ibn Adret in person, but the *nikhbad* too succumbed to illness. As spring broke, Abba-Mari had essentially given up on the passage of a ban (or so he would claim in his letter to Ibn Adret), and it appeared that the controversy would end with a whimper. At the behest of his friend Jacob de Bilqieri, brother to the late Todros, Abba-Mari wrote once more to Ibn Adret in early March of 1305, after some eight months of silence between the two communities.<sup>66</sup> With some resignation, he asked whether, after all, “the kid that I sent has grown horns with which to gore Satan”—whether, that is, *Sefer ha-Yare’ah* had had any positive impact upon the passage of a ban in Barcelona.<sup>67</sup>

#### A NEW BEGINNING (MQP 60–69 / MQD 79–88)

Ibn Adret reignited the controversy in his response, kicking off a wide-scale and effective lobby to institute the ban now that he had returned to health. His feeling, he reported to Abba-Mari, was that the tide of opinion in Catalonia was firmly on the side of instituting a ban, a sentiment which he assumed could be harnessed in Occitania as well. Ibn Adret’s enthusiasm engendered not only a substantial push for legislation on the part of ban proponents, but also increasingly pragmatic moves towards doing so, heretofore not seen since the first *ma’amad* convened in Montpellier by Abba-Mari and the late Todros de Bilqieri. For instance, Abba-Mari obtained from Ibn Adret his consent to lower the age limit enforced by the ban to twenty-five,

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<sup>66</sup> MQP 60, p. 131 / MQD 79, p. 665, l. 1.

<sup>67</sup> MQP 60, p. 132 / MQD 79, p. 667, ll. 22–23.

from thirty. Though obviously an attempt to mollify critics, this demonstrates the ban moving from a theoretical to an actual proposal. Later, ban proponents would work out whether the ban was to be individual (*prati*) or general (*kelali*) in its scope.<sup>68</sup> Invigorated, Qalonymos ha-Nasi pledged to take action in Narbonne and wrote to Ibn Adret, asking for his approval. Not only did Ibn Adret send his blessings to Qalonymos ha-Nasi in a letter that reached the latter on the eve of Passover (19 March 1305), he effectively gave him “power of attorney” over legislating the ban in Narbonne in accordance with the stipulations approved for the Barcelona ban.<sup>69</sup> Ibn Adret later wrote to Abba-Mari stating that he himself considered Qalonymos ha-Nasi’s approval of the ban proposal essential: in light of the acrimony in Montpellier, perhaps, Qalonymos stood as a unifying figure whom Ibn Adret regarded as a representative of the Occitan heartland. Hearing of this, Abba-Mari excitedly tells Qalonymos ha-Nasi to marshal the authority of the *nesi’ut* to carry out the pro-ban activities.<sup>70</sup> In particular, Abba-Mari singles out Qalonymos’ potential reach over the venerable communities of Béziers and Narbonne.<sup>71</sup> After the long winter pause, the campaign for the ban was more forceful than ever.

The impetus for the compilation that would later be known as *Minḥat Qena’ot* occurs at this juncture, when Ibn Adret writes to Abba-Mari requesting that he collect and copy for him all

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<sup>68</sup> MQp 74, p. 143 / MQd 93, p. 704, ll. 20-23.

<sup>69</sup> MQp 63, p. 135 / MQd 82, p. 680, ll. 44-45 and MQp MQ 64, p. 136 / MQd 83, p. 681, ll. 4-5.

<sup>70</sup> MQp 65, pp. 136-137 / MQd 84, p. 683, 684, ll. 8-10, 33-34.

<sup>71</sup> MQp 65, p. 137 / MQd 84, p. 684, ll. 35-36. It appears that Occitania had several axes of power even as late as 1306, with the traditional centers in Narbonne and Béziers (and probably Lunel, Beaucaire, and possibly Marseilles) being differentiated from the newer Perpignan-Montpellier axis. The eastern region of Avignon, Aix, Argentièrre, and the other Comtat-Venaissin communities would be a third axis.

the letters he could get hold of concerning the ban, intended as a reference for conducting the campaign.<sup>72</sup> This request reached Abba-Mari just after Passover 1305, and, due to practical difficulties and his propensity for care in such an undertaking, he did not respond for some time: Sasson b. Meir, one of Ibn Adret's leading pupils, subsequently wrote to Abba-Mari at the behest of Ibn Adret, again urging him to hurry.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Sasson pointedly tells Abba-Mari that as a student in the Ibn Adret's *beit midrash*, he saw all the letters that arrived there from *yehidim* and *qehillot* and himself collected them over a period of six months, whereupon he traveled with them to his hometown of Tudela from Barcelona, circulating them among the community leaders.<sup>74</sup> He reports that the Tudela aristocrats were shocked by the events and asked Sasson to relay their support of the ban to Ibn Adret.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> MQp 66, p.138 / MQd 85, p. 687, ll. 31-34.

<sup>73</sup> This individual's name is recorded as Samson rather than Sasson in four of the manuscripts and in MQp, but the play on the word ששון in MQp 69, p. 140 / MQd 88, p. 694, ll. 4-5, possibly indicates that Sasson is correct. Abba-Mari writes to Ibn Adret that "your letter," most likely his preceding letter, MQp 66 / MQd 85, along with Sasson b. Meir's letter, arrived in Montpellier on the Friday of *Parashat va-'Ananekha* (Lev. 14:14, in Parashat Tazria, read just after Pesah), MQp 68, p. 139 / MQd 87, p. 691, ll. 11-15). In a subsequent letter (MQp 69, p. 140 / MQd 88, p. 696, ll. 27-29), Abba-Mari explains apologetically to Sasson that he is doing his best to have the letters copied per Ibn Adret's request, but that he does not possess all of them and he is attempting to collect them.

<sup>74</sup> It seems that Sasson means here to tell Abba-Mari that his task is both important and not so difficult, something he should have gotten to already. Presumably, the letters in Sasson's possession did not include the letters that had been dispatched from Barcelona and were in the possession of Abba-Mari, which is why the Barcelona leadership required Abba-Mari's contribution.

<sup>75</sup> MQp 67, p. 138 / MQd 86, pp. 688-689, ll. 15-21. Sasson may have been presenting a rosier picture of the unanimous support of the Tudela *nikbbadim*, considering that in 1305 a majority of those *nikbbadim* passed an ordinance stating that the *Mishneh Torah* would serve as the basis for their communal decision making; nor was this a unique occurrence; a variety of Iberian communities adopted the *Mishneh Torah* as the authoritative code of law during the thirteenth century (Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London and Portland, Or.: Vallentine

In spite of the reenergized effort of proponents, their success was far from assured: opponents of the ban were also raising the tenor of their objection. Shelemiah de Lunel, having remained staunch in his opposition, spearheaded a public relations campaign against the passage of a ban by reading aloud Jacob Anatoli's *Mal'mad ha-Talmidim*, a book of rationalistic homiletical essays, after Minhah on Shabbat Parah (following Purim). Shelemiah and his supporters pledged to do so every following Shabbat as well.<sup>76</sup> According to Abba-Mari's account of the events, Shelemiah was under the impression that Abba-Mari was acting under Barcelona orders to institute the ban, and spoke publicly against Abba-Mari in the synagogue on the day of Parashat Qorah (Num. 16:3, read in mid-June). He also informed the Anatoli family that Abba-Mari had been accusing Jacob of impropriety.<sup>77</sup> The emphatic, public nature of the protest reading of *Mal'mad ha-Talmidim* indeed seems to have discouraged ban proponents, and Ibn Adret wrote impatiently to Qalonymos ha-Nasi, urging him to hesitate no longer and institute the Montpellier ban.<sup>78</sup>

#### THE BANS AND THE REACTION IN MONTPELLIER (MQP 70-81(A) / MQD 89-101)

This setback did not prove to stymie ban proponents: Ibn Adret subsequently requested a finalized draft text of a ban from Montpellier, albeit, in acknowledgement of the strength of the

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Mitchell, 1997), 69). However, this is perhaps further evidence of the need for such a collection and its practical function.

<sup>76</sup> MQP 68, p. 139 / MQd 87, p. 692, ll. 39-42.

<sup>77</sup> MQP 68, p. 139 / MQd 87, p. 692, ll. 37-39.

<sup>78</sup> MQP 71, pp. 141-142 / MQd 90, pp. 698-700.

opposition, instructing Abba-Mari to send it in an unmarked envelope, without a *ḥatimah*.<sup>79</sup> Abba-Mari, in cooperation with Qalonymos ha-Nasi in Narbonne, wrote and sent the draft, summarizing their initiative to Barcelona thus: “And so we assent and take upon ourselves not to occupy ourselves with natural philosophy (*ḥokhmat ha-teva*) and metaphysics (*ḥokhmat ha-’elohut*), with books written by the sages of Greece or the other nations which are not of Israel” until the age of twenty-five.<sup>80</sup> After one attains that age, according to the draft text, the study of philosophy is permitted; furthermore, Abba-Mari and Qalonymos note that all works by “the sages of Israel” are excluded from the ban, even though they may contain elements of outside knowledge.<sup>81</sup> Ibn Adret was enthusiastic about this draft text. Not only did he give his consent to it, he instructed Abba-Mari to read it—loudly—in the synagogue on the following Shabbat, which, not insignificantly, happened to be Tish‘ah be-’Av.<sup>82</sup>

The public reading of the approved Montpellier ban text never happened: at this advanced stage of the ban discussion, its opponents, realizing that legislation was imminent in both Barcelona and Montpellier, levied an excommunication ban of their own. The sources are conflicted about the nature of this counter-ban, often referred to in the scholarly literature as “the

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<sup>79</sup> MQp 66, p. 138 / MQd 85, pp. 686-687, ll. 21-24. For more on this strategy, and this instance of its use, see Chapter 2.

<sup>80</sup> MQp 70, p. 141 / MQd 89, pp. 696-697, ll. 7-12.

<sup>81</sup> MQp 70, p. 141 / MQd 89, p. 697, ll. 15-17.

<sup>82</sup> Abba-Mari merely refers to it as the Shabbat of *Parashat Ve-’Eleh ha-Devarim ’Asher Dibber Mosheh*, i.e. Deut. 1:1, in Parashat Devarim, usually read mid-summer, but in 1305 apparently falling on Tish‘ah b’Av: see A. S. Halkin, who follows Mahler’s *Handbuch der jüdischen Chronologie* (MQp 71, p. 141 / MQd 90, p. 699, ll. 14-15). Whether or not this was intended to be a statement or was merely a coincidence is uncertain.

*ʿAdrabbah*,” a term used by Simon b. Joseph (En Duran de Lunel, fl. c. 1300) but not Abba-Mari, who reserved “*ʿAdrabbah*” for his own draft of a ban cancelling the counter-ban of his opponents (i.e., a counter-counter-ban).<sup>83</sup> According to Simon, their opponents’ counter-ban was an excommunication of those who attempted to limit the study of philosophy, effectively the inverse of the Barcelona ban. According to Abba-Mari, however, the counter-ban was a different kind of ban completely. It was not only a *potential* excommunication, like the initial proposed measure which *would*, going forward, excommunicate anyone who were to study philosophy before attaining the age of twenty-five, or who teaches it to someone under that age. While the counter-ban did censure potential obstructers of philosophical study, it was predominantly an *active* excommunication of five named individuals, including Abba-Mari and his erstwhile opponent, Shelemiah de Lunel, who were to be considered *presently* under ban due to their attempts to pass legislation limiting access to philosophy.<sup>84</sup> This was a serious charge that, once promulgated, had to be dealt with. First, Abba-Mari drafted a counter-ban to the order of excommunication (this is the document to which he refers as “the *ʿAdrabbah*”).<sup>85</sup> He seems to have found numerous supporters for his *ʿAdrabbah*: he reports, “those who [initially] signed the document of the *ʿAdrabbah* in our

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<sup>83</sup> In David Kaufmann, ed., “Deux lettres de Siméon ben Joseph (En Duran de Lunel),” *Revue des études juives* 29 (1894): 224.

<sup>84</sup> The five named individuals who have been excommunicated are reported in a letter signed by six of Abba-Mari’s supporters, MQp 78, p. 150 / MQd 97, p. 416, ll. 109-112. The counter-ban would also place under ban “any man who would prevent his son from studying physics and metaphysics (*hokhmat ha-teva’ ve-ha-ʿElobut*) and the foreign wisdom (*hokhmat ha-ʿumot*) even if he be less than twenty-five years of age” (MQp 73, p. 143 / MQd 92, p. 701, ll. 6-7).

<sup>85</sup> MQp 73, p. 143 / MQd 92, p. 703, ll. 32-35.

favor number more than seventy, and presently the number has risen to over a hundred.”<sup>86</sup> Six of them composed and circulated their own letter of support for the excommunicated individuals.<sup>87</sup>

Abba-Mari also turned to Ibn Adret for advice on the validity of the order of excommunication and the Barcelona *beit din* officially invalidated the excommunications.<sup>88</sup> As much as the Montpellier community was divided over Abba-Mari’s ban proposal, it seems they were upset by his opponents’ decisive and harsh response.

Abba-Mari and his supporters in Occitania and Catalonia never stopped working on behalf of their stalled legislated even during the excommunications and the counter-ban, and Barcelona went on to officially institute the philosophical study ban at this juncture. Abba-Mari circulated formal letters updating the major Occitan communities about his efforts and appears to have come close to holding a formal vote on the ban in Montpellier.<sup>89</sup> While he was thus engaged, a merchant arrived from Barcelona bearing a packet of three letters detailing the passage of the ban there and including the text of the legislation.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> MQp 73, p. 143 / MQd 92, p. 703, ll. 34-35.

<sup>87</sup> MQp 78, pp. 144-151 / MQd 97, pp. 707-719.

<sup>88</sup> MQp 81(b), p. 154 / MQd 102, pp. 739-740; MQp 82, pp. 154-156 / MQd 103, pp. 740-745; MQp 83, pp. 156-157 / MQd 104, pp. 746-751; MQp 93, pp. 172-173 / MQd 113, pp. 804-809; and MQp 99, p. 178 / MQd 119, pp. 832-835.

<sup>89</sup> The exact procedure for such a vote in the early fourteenth century is not known, but seems to have involved the consent (in the so form of signature) of a plurality of the community’s leadership. This was not a legal procedure undertaken in the *beit din* (rabbinical court).

<sup>90</sup> Although Abba-Mari, in editing *Minbat Qena’ot*, implies that MQp 81(a)/MQd 101 includes the text of the ban, it is the concisely-worded text of MQp ps-80/MQd 99 that most likely represents the official ban. This official text is also preserved in Ibn Adret’s responsa (Vol. 1, no. 415), and the two letters that follow it (MQp ps-81/MQd 100 and MQp 81(a)/101) are elaborations on the reasons and terms of the ban (one, MQd 100, is also preserved in Ibn Adret’s responsa). Note that the Pressburg edition therefore *omits the*

We have decreed and obligated ourselves and our descendents, and all who might join us,<sup>91</sup> under threat of excommunication (*be-ko'ah ha-herem*), that not one man from our community shall study the books of the Greeks on the subjects of physics (*hokhmat ba-teva'*) and metaphysics (*hokhmat ha-'elohut*), whether it be composed in their language or translated into another language, from now until fifty years from now, until he attain the age of twenty-five. Nor shall any man from our community teach any Jew these subjects until they [the students] reach the age of twenty-five—lest those subjects pull him after them, and remove him from the Torah of Israel.<sup>92</sup>

THE END (MQP 81(B)-101 / MQD 102-120(A)-(B))

With the support and lobbying activities of Ibn Adret and Asher b. Yeḥiel, the ban was surprisingly uncontroversial in Iberia (or at least it so appears in *Minḥat Qena'ot*), but in Occitania, the intercommunal debate continued unabated until the issuance of orders of expulsion by the French crown and many of its dependencies beginning in July 1306.<sup>93</sup> This disruption irrevocably dashed Abba-Mari and his supporters' hope of instituting a ban analogous to that of Barcelona in Montpellier or elsewhere in Occitania. Abba-Mari relates his own experience with the expulsion in a matter-of-fact way that belies the coda which, in many ways, it was. He sedately details how he

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*official text of the Barcelona ban.* In an editorial note following Letter 79 and preceding Letter 81, Bischles notes that that what that he intentionally omitted what he calls Letter 80, beginning with *אוי להם לברית* "אוי להם לברית" (=MQd 99, l. 4), because it is printed in Ibn Adret's responsa and in the "letter of the Bedersi," i.e. Yedaiah ha-Penini's *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut* (which is in Ibn Adret's responsa, Vol. 1, nos. 416-418, i.e., immediately following): see the editorial note on p. 152. Bischles also explains that although he found Letter 81, incipit *"מי יוכל עצור"* (= MQd 100, l. 2), in a significantly different version in the (now lost) Florentine manuscript, he is not printing it because it too is printed in the Rashba's responsa.

<sup>91</sup> The language, with the exception of the term *gazarnu*, is lifted from Esther 9:27, in which Jews accept onto themselves the observance Purim.

<sup>92</sup> MQp / MQd 99, p. 723, ll. 13-18.

<sup>93</sup> Abba-Mari gives the date of the French expulsion as 20 Av 5066 (2 August 1306), a Friday (MQp 100, p. 179 / MQd 120(a), p. 835, ll. 1, 4-5). However, the Jews of Montpellier, who were ruled by Majorca, were exiled in the month of Marḥeshvan, 5067 (which began on 10 October 1306) (MQp 100, p. 179 / MQd 120(a), p. 835, ll. 5-6).



left Montpellier, settled in Arles, and sought to move to Perpignan, where his settlement was blocked by ban opponents, necessitating the intervention of Moses b. Samuel b. Asher.<sup>94</sup> It seems that Abba-Mari himself envisioned his efforts on behalf of the ban as potentially continuing, which are possible motivations for his struggle to move to Perpignan from Arles and for his compilation and editing of *Minḥat Qena'ot*. Abba-Mari was not entirely wrong about the continuing strength of the Occitan philosophical tradition. In fact, in the reconstituted centers of Occitan culture, rationalistic writing developed and flourished, reaching its apex precisely in the years following the French expulsions with the works of Yedaiah ha-Penini, Moses Narboni, Joseph Ibn Kaspi, and, most famously, of Levi b. Gershom, among others. It was, finally, the hard edges of economics and the soft edges of cultural change, and not a ban restricting its study, that led to the decline of philosophy among Occitans and, indeed, among world Jewry in the late medieval period.<sup>95</sup> But

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<sup>94</sup> MQp 100, p. 179 / MQd 120(a), pp. 836-837, ll. 11-21. Abba-Mari details that after leaving Montpellier he settled in Arles, which he subsequently left “in the fourth month of our exile,” arriving in Perpignan on 1 Shevat [5067] (5 January 1307). Despite providing the details of his arrival there, of the efforts to prevent him from settling, and the intervention of his supporters, he does not report the outcome of the matter or state definitely that he was able to settle in Perpignan. The anonymous headnote preserved in several manuscripts to Abba-Mari’s eulogy for ha-Me’iri is ambiguous on whether Abba-Mari wrote the eulogy from Perpignan or sent it there (MQd \*127, p. 875, l. 1), but as Dimitrovsky points out (p. 875, n. to l. 1, s.v. “פרפניאן”) the eulogy itself implies that Abba-Mari was not present in Perpignan and had to dispatch his writing (MQd \*127, p. 877, l. 30). I would like to thank Gregg Stern for bringing this significant omission on the part of Abba-Mari to my attention. See also his comments on this matter in *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture*, 223.

<sup>95</sup> On the economic causes and ramifications of the French expulsions, see Sophia Menache, “The King, the Church and the Jews: Some Considerations on the Expulsions from England and France,” *Medieval History* 13 (1987): 223-236; and William C. Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Phillip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 177-213. On the decline of Jewish philosophy in the late Middle Ages, see Colette Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 273-412; Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 499-573 (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Isadore Twersky, “Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman, 431-457 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Mauro Zonta, *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century: A History and Source*

Abba-Mari was not wrong in thinking his project continued to be relevant; nor, in its fundamental questions, has the debate he instigated ceased to blaze among Jews seven centuries later.

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*Book* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Joseph Hacker, "The Role of R. Abraham Bibage in the Controversy Over the Study and Status of Philosophy in Fifteenth-Century Spain" [Hebrew], in *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1969), Div. C.; and Richard Emery, "Documents Concerning Some Jewish Scholars in Perpignan in the Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries," in *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, edited by Shlomo Simonshon and Joseph Shatzmiller, 27-48. Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, 1976.

No less than its contents, the composition process of *Minḥat Qena'ot* reflects the importance of ideas to the communities represented by the letter-writers: communities where controversial ideas were debated publicly, written about in numerous scrolls, and disseminated via messenger over hundreds of kilometers.<sup>1</sup> The anxieties raised for ban proponents by allegorizing sermons and astrological talismans, and the furious response of the defenders of the region and its intellectual culture, quite literally led men to crisscross the Pyrenees, traveling an area stretching from Toledo to Aix. Because Abba-Mari's editorial hand reveals much about the manner in which letters were conveyed from one community to another, his compositional strategies reflect the physical mobilization involved in holding this public discussion. Moreover, so great was the importance of the ideas under discussion that Abba-Mari was moved to preserve the documentary history of the controversy: he faithfully reproduced the letters he had in his possession (including

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* texts, the letters traveled relatively short distances (varying from 100 to 350 km per trip), approximately within the boundaries of Argentièrre to the north, Toledo to the south, Navarre to the west, and Aix to the east—though usually traversing a small portion of this area at a time. The expectation expressed by the correspondents was that letter transmission would be swift, perhaps not longer than a week, particularly along the coastal Barcelona-Perpignan-Montpellier corridor. This was typical for the period. This accords well with the research done by Sophia Menache, who suggests average speeds of 25 to 40 km per day for messengers traveling on foot, the most common way messengers traveled: see “Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: A Survey,” in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, edited by *idem.*, 15-56 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 50-52. Similarly, in his synthesis of the Cairo Geniza materials, S. D. Goitein provides a sense of the scope of letter delivery and its significance as a channel of information: “Yedaya of Narbonne, France, conveyed letters from Cairo to Jerusalem for business friends from Tunisia living in the capitals of Egypt and Palestine. A pilgrim from the kingdom of Castilia, Spain, carried with him a compendium of Hebrew lexicography from Jerusalem to Wargla in the Algerian Sahara. Likewise, ‘Jacob, the Leonese pilgrim’ brought back with him to Spain a book by a Karaite author active in Jerusalem. It was soon used by a famous writer living in that country” (*A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999], 1:55).

those unflattering to him), carefully marking off where his introductory notes ended and the text began, even pledging to compile a separate volume of rationalist letters. The care with which he arranged and copied the letters reflects an incipient notion of objective history, even as he was motivated by polemical goals. By compiling the letters into a book—a book with a title, chapter divisions, a prolegomenon and introductory essay—Abba-Mari sought to control the narrative of events to polemical ends. At times Abba-Mari allowed the various texts to speak for themselves, at others attempting to divert their voices.

Aware of his own role in the creation of a text from multiple other physical objects, Abba-Mari attempted to arrange the letters in his possession in comprehensible order and to provide details about their composition and reception, while also including polemical remarks and arguing for the necessity of the ban in his general introduction and theological essay.<sup>2</sup> Thus, to read *Minḥat Qena'ot* with sensitivity to Abba-Mari's editorship, it is necessary to differentiate between material which originates within the preserved letters written between 1304 and 1306 and that which originates in Abba-Mari's editorial apparatus written c. 1307.<sup>3</sup> Susan Einbinder has advocated such a nuanced reading of medieval Hebrew documents in order to account for complex textual forms:

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<sup>2</sup> Abba-Mari acknowledges that that he carefully selected the letters included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* to the exclusion of others: MQp 97, pp. 176-177 / MQd 117, p. 824, ll. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> The evidence found within the text indicates that Abba-Mari likely edited *Minḥat Qena'ot* in 1307, possibly in Perpignan. Of the letters whose headnotes are clearly authored by Abba-Mari, the latest given date is אחד בשבט in the year שבע לפרט, i.e., 1 Shevat (= 5 January) 1307, in MQp 100, p. 179 / MQd 120(b), p. 836, l. 12, with reference to ll. 5-6. This is the date on which he reached Perpignan from Arles, Abba-Mari reports, in the fourth month of his exile from Montpellier, although it is not clear that he was allowed to settle there, as discussed in Chapter 1. All the letters authored by Abba-Mari which occur *after* this letter (MQp 100 / MQd 120[b]), in those manuscripts which contain them, appear to have been included by a later editor, since they bear headnotes that mention Abba-Mari in the third person. This points to a *terminus ad quem* of 1307 on Abba-Mari's active editorial work on *Minḥat Qena'ot*.

Hebrew manuscripts, fragmentary witnesses to a perilous journey, are not just the purveyors of disembodied “texts” to be copied, annotated and corrected, and naively read; they are physical objects, and the clues to their fabrication and transmission reinsert them into a moving historical narrative whose scenery changes over time. To the extent that this is possible, we must try to see them in that landscape, not only to enrich our reading of their contents but also to comprehend some of the scope of the world that they were either incapable of representing or chose not to represent.<sup>4</sup>

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Among the later inclusions in some manuscripts of *Minḥat Qena'ot*, a letter written by Ibn Adret (and bearing only a very brief headnote of uncertain authorship) can be the implicitly dated to 1309, since it mentions the pope’s residency in Avignon; see MQd \*124, p. 862, ll. 10–11. Two later compositions by Abba-Mari are sometimes included in printed versions of *Minḥat Qena'ot*, a eulogy for Ibn Adret (d. c. 1310) and one for Menaḥem ha-Meiri (d. 1316): they are excluded from the Pressburg edition and included by Dimitrovsky, as MQd \*126 מנחם םלך ם75, and MQd \*127, pp. 875–883. Ibn Adret’s date of death is given as 1310 by Abraham Zacuto (1452–c. 1515) in *Sefer ha-Yuḥasin* (in Part 5; p. 223 in *Sefer Yuḥasin ha-Shalem*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by Herschell Filipowski [Jerusalem, 1963]); ha-Me’iri’s is apparently known from contemporary reports, including Abba-Mari’s eulogy, which references Sancho I of Majorca (r. 1311–1324)’s confiscation and taxation of Hebrew books in 1315 (MQd \*127, p. 881, ll. 84–85, and see also the later editorial headnote by an unknown author, p. 875, ll. 4–6). This makes the latest letter appended to *Minḥat Qena'ot* the eulogy for ha-Me’iri, inclusive of Yedayah ha-Penini’s *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut*. (Colette Sirat has proposed that *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut* be dated prior to the French expulsion; see *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* [Paris and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme], 274.)

However, there is no evidence for Abba-Mari’s involvement in the *compilation* of *Minḥat Qena'ot* after 1307; the task may have been taken up by one of his students, who refers to Abba-Mari as מורנו (“our teacher”), although this is a phrase that may be merely generic (MQd \*126, p. 869, l. 1; MQd \*127, p. 876, l. 1). On the other hand, it is also possible that Abba-Mari began the task of arranging the letters and composing the headnotes earlier than 1307. The latest date given by Abba-Mari *prior* to MQp 100 / MQd 120(b) (in which Abba-Mari describes and dates the French expulsion) occurs in MQp 81[b] / MQd 102, an extended headnote that describes letters arriving in Montpellier from Barcelona on 12 Kislev 5066 (30 November 1305). This means that the letters MQp 82 / MQd 103 through MQp 99 / MQd 119 were written in the approximately eight-month time period between 30 November 1305 and 2 August 1306 (the date of the French general expulsion, as given by Abba-Mari). If he waited until the letter exchange was complete—or rather, halted by the expulsion—then it is certainly possible that Abba-Mari began editing in 1306. It is also possible that his editorial work began even earlier, during the active campaign. However, it seems that the headnotes were not written contemporaneously with the letters themselves, but at a later date. It seems, then, that Abba-Mari likely compiled and edited *Minḥat Qena'ot* in late 1306 through 1307, perhaps beginning at Arles and finishing in Perpignan or wherever he subsequently settled.

<sup>4</sup> Susan L. Einbinder, *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 9. Einbinder’s work belongs to a body of recent scholarship that advocates giving attention to all parts of the surviving manuscripts, including the ways the text is broken up, the titles and headings used, commentaries presented along with the “base-texts,” and other such features. Eli Yassif has argued for the importance of recognizing the composite, shifting nature of

In the case of *Minḥat Qena'ot*, the resulting compilation is particularly complex as a textual object, since it includes texts composed by different people at different times interwoven with editorial comments. Specifically, it is by means of paratextual devices that Abba-Mari transforms *Minḥat Qena'ot* from a simple anthology of copied letters into an interpretive presentation of historical events; these paratextual devices include the introductory notes he wrote during the editing process, the general introduction, and even the title he gave the work, signaling its status as a unified volume shaped by his editorship.<sup>5</sup> Once compiled by Abba-Mari, *Minḥat Qena'ot* seems to have enjoyed an uncomplicated transmission process that accurately preserves his editorial process;<sup>6</sup>

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medieval texts in his study of the *Alfa-Beita de-Ben Sira*, which circulated in numerous versions: see *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle-Ages: A Critical Text and Literary Studies* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984). More specifically, Daniel Abrams maintains, “Text layouts should...be viewed as interpretation and in many cases is no less important than the selection of the base-text” (“Critical and Post-Critical Textual Scholarship of Jewish Mystical Literature: Notes on the History and Development of Modern Editing Techniques,” *Kabbalah* 1 (1996): 51). Boaz Huss has illustrated the process by which such editorial decisions shape the reading and reception of a text in his work on the 1684 Sulzbach edition of the *Zohar*. The Sulzbach edition includes features such as textual emendations, variant readings, the inclusion of additional texts, interpretations, and other study aids, as well as adopting the innovative page layout of the Cremona-Lublin editions. These, Huss notes, “were adopted by almost all subsequent editions of the *Zohar*” and as a result “played a significant role both in shaping the Zoharic canon and in the history of its reception” (“The Text and Context of the 1684 Sulzbach Edition of the *Zohar*,” in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Howard Kreisel and Chanita Goodblatt, 117–38 [Be’er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006], 117, 120). Similarly, the way *Minḥat Qena'ot* has been read and used was effected by its division into chapters—not always corresponding to the actual letters they contain—as well as the manner in which it was copied, and later typeset, to indicate the distinction between Abba-Mari’s notes and the letters he copied. Dimitrovsky makes this point in his introduction, 1:17.

<sup>5</sup> The term *paratext* is the coinage of Gérard Genette. In his influential book *Paratexts*, Genette studies systematically the features of printed books beyond the content of the base-text normally regarded as “the book” or primary source (*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by Jane E. Lewin [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; originally published as *Seuils* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987]). Genette labeled and scrutinized a variety of textual features normally overlooked in historical and literary research. Though his studies are focused on the modern novel, Genette’s observations and terminology can be applied fruitfully to medieval books, especially when they are compared to their modern, printed incarnations; paratextual features of manuscripts include medieval technologies such as codex binding, decorative initials, colophons, and marginalia. For an application of Genette’s ideas to premodern Jewish literature, see Shlomo

the integrity of *Minḥat Qena'ot* as a textual unit was relatively stable, although the text he created was not an “original” in the sense of an intentionally closed work written by a single author and intended for public consumption in its static form.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE CHARACTER AND FUNCTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL LETTERS

The letters which make up *Minḥat Qena'ot* are, then, textual objects within a textual object, each a social document of communal significance with a distinct etiology shaped by the exigencies of medieval communication systems. Letters were, aside from oral communication, the preeminent means of conveying and disseminating information and represent one of the most common genres of extant medieval writing.<sup>8</sup> This is a technicality, but a significant one: most documents that began their lives as letters—that is, as written correspondence conveyed from a person or persons in one place to persons in another location—were eventually transmuted from

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Berger, “An Invitation to Buy and Read: Paratexts of Yiddish Books in Amsterdam, 1650-1800,” *Book History* 7 (2004): 31-60.

<sup>6</sup> See the Introduction for details of the extant manuscripts, the two recensions they represent, and the significance of the differences between these.

<sup>7</sup> In one of the eight extant manuscripts of *Minḥat Qena'ot* (Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. héb. 970; ד in Dimitrovsky's critical apparatus), there is a brief introductory note, likely written by the fifteenth-century copyist, in which the work is described as “regarding the matter of the aristocrats who dismantle the Torah of Moses” (“על דבר היחידים המתפרקים בתורת משה”) MQd 225, ll. 1-2; absent in the Pressburg edition). The copyist seems to accept the work as a unified volume that addresses a theological and social problem, rather than viewing it as an anthology of letters. Only *after* its composition, he says, did it become a missive: “he [Abba-Mari] sent it to the eminent Rabbi Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona” (MQd, 225, ll. 2-3).

<sup>8</sup> Among medieval manuscripts extant today, “Letters are extremely common”: Colette Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, translated and edited by Nicholas de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 98.



“epistles” into “books.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, the terms *sefer*, *’iggeret*, and *ketav* are used interchangeably in *Minḥat Qena'ot*;<sup>10</sup> in one text, the terms *sefer* (book, scroll, codex), *’iggeret* (letter, epistle), and *ketav* (writing, essay) are all used in reference to the same letter.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Abba-Mari uses *sefer* to refer to the compilation he is working on, in which case he is using the term to mean something distinct from *’iggeret* or *ketav*.<sup>12</sup> The fact that *sefer* readily applies to letters demonstrates both the fluidity and centrality of the epistolary form for Abba-Mari and his contemporaries: fluidity, because an epistle could be consulted like a reference book, and centrality, because a letter had the status of a published work. However, the book-like status of the medieval letter should not obscure the fact that letters were created to perform pragmatic functions. Unlike codices placed on

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<sup>9</sup> As Joseph Dan and Angel Saenz-Badillos observe, this applies broadly during the period (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Letters and Letter Writers,” 12:668–669). Whether compiled into collections, as in the case of *responsa*, or circulated as treatises, many medieval texts that attained lives of their own in codex form were initially formatted as letters. Notable among these is *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, which utilized the epistolary format to emphasize the master-to-disciple path of transmission mandated for esoteric knowledge—while at the same time ensuring that the work reached a wide audience. On esoteric transmission, see Moshe Idel, “On the History of the Interdiction against the Study of Kabbalah before the Age of Forty” [Hebrew], *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 1–20 and Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., “It has been two months since the arrival of the *sefer* of the rabbi, our teacher, the light of Israel” (MQp 24, p. 68 / MQd 43, p. 438, l. 83); “Concerning what you wrote to me in your *sefer* about banning and excommunicating...” (MQp 14, p. 52 / MQd 32, p. 383, l. 125); “Presently, with the arrival of your *sefer*, the messenger is breathing down my neck” (MQp 17, p. 56 / MQd 35, p. 396, l. 13).

<sup>11</sup> MQp 21, pp. 61, 62 / MQd 39, p. 414–417, ll. 1, 17, 38–39. The word *mikhtav* is also used here (l. 40), but insofar as it is a citation of a verse (Ex. 32:16) employed for the purposes of praising the contemporary letter, this does not indicate the usage of *mikhtav* in reference to the epistolary form. On the other hand, *sefer* occurs as “letter” clearly in the Bible, as in 1 Kings 21:8, 2 Kings 10:1, Isaiah 39:1, and in many places in Esther (1:22, 3:13, 8:10, 9:20, 30). A precedent for the overlapping use of these various terms comes from Arabic, where *risālah* (“letter”) is often used to mean “literary essay,” a usage which passed into Hebrew. I thank Raymond Scheindlin for this observation.

<sup>12</sup> MQp / MQd 117, p. 824, ll. 1–3. Here Abba-Mari also uses the word *hibbur* (“composition,” “compilation”) in reference to *Minḥat Qena'ot*. Also, the term *sefer* is used throughout in reference to works of Greek and Islamic philosophy.



a shelf to be consulted by scholars, the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters were produced for a stated audience (individual or corporate) to which they were actively disseminated over a distance. The letter is a tool of communication and the primary means of publication in the absence of mass printing technologies, including not only the mechanized press that was still some one hundred and fifty years in Abba-Mari's future, but also the scriptoria which all medieval Jewries lacked.<sup>13</sup> The desire for publicity, or, conversely, the need for discretion, dictated the style and content of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters. Literary and abstract as they may be, the letters are public documents designed to convey information and effect action.

It is clear that the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters were distributed as public documents to be circulated among leading members of a community, and thus they belong to the category of public communication. Medieval letters can be divided into the categories of public and private, or circular and personal, which indicate a letter's function, not its number of addressees.<sup>14</sup> Especially within the Jewish community, which did not have formal offices like those established by Christian royal, ecclesiastical, or municipal administrations, the distinction between the personal and the

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<sup>13</sup> Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 214-216. Michael Riegler has argued that medieval yeshivot were at times centers of book production akin to the Christian monastic or scholastic scriptoria and to the Muslim *maktab*; see his "Were the Yeshivot in Spain Centers for the Copying of Books?" *Sepharad* 57, no. 2 (1997): 377-378, 397.

<sup>14</sup> This follows the categorizations employed by Sophia Menache in "Communication in the Jewish Diaspora," 24. Ram Ben-Shalom differentiates types of medieval letters somewhat differently, referring to *all* letters addressed to individual as "personal or close letters" and terming those sent to a group of people "circular or open letters" ("Communication and Propaganda Between Provence and Spain: The Controversy over Extreme Allegorization [1303-1306]," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, 177). In light of Ben-Shalom's observations, it may be useful to subdivide public letters into individual and group public letters, a distinction easily identified in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters.

public letter is not precise.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, the personal letter functioned to convey information of import only to its recipients, such as business details or personal affairs, while the public letter communicated and circulated information of importance to the community.<sup>16</sup> Public letters more commonly transmit information of an intellectual nature, especially halakhic matters of all kinds (civic, ritual, liturgical, theological), as well as pragmatic information such as reports of outbreaks of violence or disease.<sup>17</sup> As manifestly public letters, the functionality of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* missives must have affected their composition and so must inform their interpretation.

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<sup>15</sup> In the Latin West, the papacy cultivated the use of encyclicals and bulls in staking its claim of power over the emerging centralized monarchies, while monarchs and other lords organized chancelleries responsible for producing and archiving official correspondence (Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei: Communication in the Middle Ages* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 14-19).

<sup>16</sup> S. D. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:11-12. Goitein notes, "Normally, a letter, especially when going overseas, deals with many topics at a time...Business was conducted on the basis of trust and friendship, wherefore business letters are rarely without a person touch. For this very reason there is no clear-cut demarcation between commercial and private correspondence," 1:11. The ambiguity between private and public letters is demonstrated by the so-called Hebrew ethical will (*zava'ot*), usually a letter written by a father to his son, family, or pupils relating ethical advice. Though often addressing an individual and containing personal details, they were very much public documents, disseminated to publicize the views of the author. See, for example, the *zava'ot* of Judah b. Saul Ibn Tibbon (c. 1120-1190) and Joseph Ibn Kaspi, included in Israel Abrahams' anthology *Hebrew Ethical Wills (Zava'ot Ge'onei Yisra'el)*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1926; reprint, 1976 [one-volume facsimile]; rev. ed., 2006)—though note that the documents collected by Abrahams do not all belong to this category in their original form. (Ibn Kaspi's text is cited in the Conclusion.) Franz Kobler suggests that *zava'ot* and responsa constitute the equivalent of public communications, whereas other kinds of letters should be viewed as unofficial or personal (*Letters of Jews Through the Ages*, 2 vols. [London: East and West Library, 1953], 1:lviii-lix).

<sup>17</sup> Examples of letters reporting calamities include a missive dispatched by the *qahal* of Palermo c. 1040 for wide circulation, reporting on the violence between the Byzantines, Zīrīdūn, and the Muslim population in Sicily; a letter dated December 1095 sent from northern France to the Rhineland communities, warning of approaching crusaders, which arrived in Mainz in January 1096; and well-attested circulation of information concerning the Blois massacre of 1171. See Menache, "Communication in the Jewish Diaspora," 24-26; on Blois in particular, see Robert Chazan, "The Blois Incident of 1171: A Study of the Jewish Intercommunal Organization," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 36 (1968): 13-31, especially 17-24.

For instance, it is evident that the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters were strategically sent, whether targeted for public distribution or attempting to restrict readership to a select group among the public.<sup>18</sup> Toward the end of the debate over the passing of a ban in Occitania, for example, Abba-Mari sent a brief, general letter in support of the initiative “to the rest of the aristocrats of the lands.”<sup>19</sup> The full text of this letter is copied into one “chapter” in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, followed by two alternate introductions to the same base text, much like a series of cover letters used to introduce identical copies of a letter.<sup>20</sup> Here we see evidence of a practice of targeted circulation to different communities, urging them to undertake coordinated action. Another example of a text targeted for broad circulation is *Sefer ha-Yare'aḥ* (*Book of the Moon*).<sup>21</sup> Tucked within a letter, *Sefer ha-Yare'aḥ* was a lengthier and more formal statement of ban proponents' positions and as such was earmarked for wide distribution; as discussed in Chapter 1, *Sefer ha-Yare'aḥ* was intended to inspire a greater response than it mustered. A third example of targeted circulation is implied by Ibn Adret's response to a question posed about medical talismans by one of his students, to whom he

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<sup>18</sup> This kind of circulation is attested in other works of the period, such as Meir b. Simon ha-Me'ili's *Milḥemet Mizvah*, extant in a unique manuscript, Parma Ms. de Rossi 155, a complex and probably composite text written in the mid-thirteenth century and containing an account of ha-Me'ili's disputation with the bishop of Narbonne as well as strong remarks against a group of Qabbalists. In it, ha-Me'ili states that he dispatched it “to the rabbis of every town.” Ha-Me'ili did the same for his *Meshiv Nefesh*, a “pamphlet” circulated in support of Maimonides' *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (in the *Mishneh Torah*). See Shlomoh Zalman Havlin, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Meir ben Simeon ha-Me'ili,” 13:785. *Milḥemet Mizvah* is transcribed in W. K. Herskowitz, “Judaean-Christian Dialogue in Provence as Reflected in *Milḥemet Mitzvah* of Rabbi Meir ha-Meili,” Ph.D. diss. (Yeshiva University, 1974), Heb. sec., 1-271.

<sup>19</sup> MQp 75, p. 143 / MQd 94, p. 705, l. 1.

<sup>20</sup> The two alternate introductions are MQp 74 / MQd 93 and MQp 75 / MQd 94.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Adret reacts to the contents of *Sefer ha-Yare'aḥ* in subsequent letters, demonstrating that it was sent to him, and not merely inserted later into the correspondence in the same way that Abba-Mari inserted his introductory theological treatise at the beginning of the compilation.

complains, “I thought that that responsum of mine was passed around the entire region, since I wasn’t writing secretly.”<sup>22</sup>

Conversely, the public nature of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters could be problematic when conveying sensitive information, and letter-writers at times attempted to suppress this public function in the interest of discretion. Because letters could not be controlled by their author, they were a potentially divisive or subversive means of conveying information, which necessitated the use of various obfuscatory tactics or even self-censorship.<sup>23</sup> Maintaining the privacy of a letter might require some degree of deception, as in sending a letter in an unmarked envelope. When Ibn Adret wanted to keep the proposal for the text of the Montpellier ban out of public discourse, he attempted to do so by concealing the contents of the letter, instructing Abba-Mari and Qalonymos b. Todros ha-Nasi, as mentioned in Chapter 1:

I have already hinted to you and said outright to the noble prince (*nasi*) Rabbi Qalonymos, may God protect him, that if you do this thing [write a draft of the ban] and send it to me

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<sup>22</sup> MQp 17, p. 56 / MQd 35, p. 397, ll. 34-35. This statement also demonstrates awareness of the intent to publicize or conceal a letter’s contents.

<sup>23</sup> Both transgressive and conservative ideas, then, benefitted from the letter as a media form. Sophia Menache correctly points out that medieval communication systems benefited authorities and heretical minority groups alike in the Christian culture. On the one hand, “The communication systems developed in the ecclesiastical order and the Western monarchies had emerged in the framework of conventional norms and, as such, enjoyed legitimacy and wide support,” while at the same time, “Lacking socioreligious legitimization, the so-called heretical movements were forced to rely almost exclusively on the efficiency of their communication systems to swell their ranks with new sympathizers, while clandestinely maintaining the current contacts among their members” (Menache, *Vox Dei*, 213). Menache has also observed how letters could be agents of the enforcement of bans of excommunication: “The weight of excommunication in medieval and early-modern Jewry undoubtedly resulted from the existence of communication channels among scattered communities and the corporate essence of the community, which excluded any possibility of survival for an ostracized Jew” (“Communication in the Jewish Diaspora,” 20).

written in a letter *but without an address* (*ḥatimah*), then my arms are outstretched and my ears stand at attention.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of discretion did not escape Abba-Mari's notice; in a letter to Sasson b. Meir, one of Ibn Adret's leading students, he remarks, "I'm presently dispatching to our teacher the rabbi a copy of the *taqqanah* as we see fit to issue it, unaddressed as he requested."<sup>25</sup> Ibn Adret appears to be concerned that this sensitive material might be intercepted if the contents of the letter could be guessed at from the *ḥatimah* visible on the outside of the letter. Self-censorship is also reported in *Minḥat Qena'ot* due to fears of interception of sensitive materials. Relatively early in the course of the controversy, Todros de Bilqieri states that he has decided not to send more letters of support to Barcelona due to the concern that they might fall into the wrong hands and leak information to his opponents:

More words were written by aristocrats,<sup>26</sup> and many leaders of Israel<sup>27</sup> wrote scrolls about these delicate matters, so that they might reach the ignorant among our people who walk in darkness; but I will not permit these to reach letter-writers, because I wish to keep the

<sup>24</sup> MQp 66, p. 138 / MQd 85, p. 686-687, ll. 21-23, emphasis added. More fully, *וכן אמרתי לך, וכן אמרתי, מפני שר הגדול והנשא ר' קולונימוס י"א, אם את הדבר הזה תעשו ותשלחו לי כתוב בספר ואף בלי חתימה*. I have translated the word *חתימה* as address in this context because it seems to refer to the address written on the exterior of the folded letter (Dimitrovsky agrees; see his note to l. 22, 686-687). On internal *ḥatimot*, see below.

<sup>25</sup> MQp 69, p. 140 / MQd 88, p. 695, ll. 19-20.

<sup>26</sup> My translation follows Dimitrovsky's reading (see p. 424, n. to l. 56), i.e., "ministers of the holy community," "aristocrats"; the term *שרי קודש* is lifted from 1 Chronicles 24:5 and has a technical meaning there, but seems to be used generically here. Dimitrovsky adds that the aristocrats in question are those of Perpignan.

<sup>27</sup> Todros' *אלפי ראשי ישראל* is reminiscent of *ראשי אלפי ישראל*, which occurs in Numbers 1:16 and 10:4, and in Joshua 24:21. Dimitrovsky suggests Jeremiah 13:21, *אלפים לראש*, as the model (p. 424, n. to l. 56). It seems to me another term for aristocrats or leaders of the community, as I have translated.

matters hidden, and do not want them to fall into the hands of scribes who might disseminate the words inaccurately.<sup>28</sup>

Todros here expresses confidence in the ability of writing to inform the public (to “reach the ignorant”) but says that he will not risk sending such text via letter because of the potential for intentional tampering endemic to letter-writing. Such precautionary tactics point, again, to the letter’s real effect on public discourse and its power as a means of disseminating knowledge and information.

So important was the information contained in the letters that the character of the messenger was considered highly relevant in dispatching letters. Most of the messengers mentioned in *Minḥat Qena'ot* were community members of high social standing who were traveling, apparently for independent purposes, and incidentally conveying letters with them, as per the widespread practice in the period. For instance, Abba-Mari enclosed a letter with a colleague who went to Barcelona in order to procure funds for the wedding of his daughter; Abba-Mari asked Ibn Adret to recommend the man to the wealthy members of the Barcelona *qahal*, ostensibly in return for the favor of conveying the letter. Abba-Mari describes at length the qualifications of this man:

Here I am assuring your learned honor that this aristocrat who carries this letter, bows down to dignify the holiness of your stature. He rolls around in the earth at the feet of your lowliest of your students and is always saying that he is your servant. Truly, he is learned in many a subject and great in Torah, humble and modest and honest...He has given me permission to disclose to you, and I am not doing so of my own decision, that it is because of his daughter’s difficult situation, as awful as scorpions to him, that he is going to the doorstep of so many others. I’ve also asked another lesser luminary to be his host and introduce him to others who can help him.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MQp 22, p. 64 / MQd 40, p. 424, ll. 56-58.

<sup>29</sup> MQp 59, p. 131 / MQd 78, p. 664-665, ll. 19-26.

Similarly, when a member of the Barcelona *qahal*, Samuel Galil, set out for Montpellier for personal reasons, Ibn Adret sent a letter intended for the Argentièrre *qahal* with Samuel so that he could give it to Abba-Mari to convey further. Ibn Adret asks Abba-Mari in the letter, “Please take it upon yourself to be his host and guide him in all his affairs there [in Montpellier].”<sup>30</sup> Samuel would once again serve as messenger, probably when he returned several months later to Barcelona from Montpellier, bringing letters from Abba-Mari to Ibn Adret.<sup>31</sup> Simon b. Joseph Duran mentions that the ban opponents in Montpellier sent letters to Perpignan with Isaac de Lattes and other aristocrats who were traveling to attend a wedding there.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, Abba-Mari notes that a scroll containing four letters was delivered to him by a merchant (*soḥer*) who was apparently traveling from Barcelona to Montpellier for business.<sup>33</sup> Men of such standing were entrusted with delivering letters quickly and discretely.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> MQp 49, p. 104 / MQd 68, p. 579, ll. 48-49.

<sup>31</sup> MQp 59, p. 131 / MQd 78, p. 663, ll. 4-5 (and see also l. 19). It is here that Samuel’s surname, Galil, is given.

<sup>32</sup> In *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, edited by David Kaufmann, in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz*, Heb. sec., 143-174 (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884; reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1974), 152. Cited also by Ben-Shalom in “Communication and Propaganda,” 190.

<sup>33</sup> “ואחר כן בא אלי סוחר ובידו מגלת ספר כתובה, נתנה לו הרב י”ץ בידו כדי להגיעה לידיי” MQp 79, p. 151 / MQd 98, p. 720, ll. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> The professional Jewish courier does not seem to have existed, despite the fact that “the letter was the most commonly used means for information transmission” among medieval Jewries (Ben-Shalom, “Communication and Propaganda,” 177). Rather, persons paid as messengers performed that function in addition to another profession or purpose, such as business travel; thus letter delivery relied almost entirely upon traveling friends, family, and students, or Jewish merchants, travelers, or couriers paid for this task. Apparently the volume of correspondence did not support an independent postal system, which is not surprising considering the minute demographics of medieval Jewry. Nevertheless, the expansion of trade and mercantilism prompted greater need for written communication among Jews just as it did among Christians; arguably, Jews were more communicative among communities earlier in the Middle Ages

Letters were often directives for action in which their couriers participated as agents of dissemination. The integrity of the messenger, it seems, was important also because he was sometimes tasked with carrying out the activities prescribed in the letter. Often younger men or students, messengers transmitting letters at the behest of a senior member of the community could be tasked with what Ben-Shalom has termed propaganda campaigns in Iberia and Occitania respectively.<sup>35</sup> Such messengers traveled throughout the region, enlisting support, often in the concrete form of signatures. Sasson b. Meir, the student of Ibn Adret, tells Abba-Mari of his campaign west of Catalonia:

Six months ago I went to my birthplace, Tudela in Navarre, with all [your letters], as I presently live in Barcelona where I make my home; and I brought the letters with me and showed them to the communities and to the learned of the land. They were shocked by the matter and replied, asking me to tell our master that we are correct to ban and excommunicate according to all that he will permit.<sup>36</sup>

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precisely because of their early involvement in trade activity, especially in Europe but also under Islam, as in the famous case of the Radhāniyyah. Eliezer Gutwirth maintains that the infrastructure and socio-economic developments of Jews' neighbors, including "a material infrastructure like means of reproduction, the organization of time and space, copyists, velocity, roads, and means of transport" are among the primary factors affecting Jewish communications in the late medieval period: see his "Hebrew Letters, Hispanic Mail: Communication Among Fourteenth-Century Aragon Jewry," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, edited by Sophia Menache, 257-282 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 259; see also Menache's essay in the same volume, "Communication in the Jewish Diaspora," 46-57. Gutwirth also notes the emergence of three trends in particular during this time period: a substantial increase and development of what he terms "the learned non-halakhic essay," of Hebrew letter formularies, and of Jewish letters in romance ("Hebrew Letters, Hispanic Mail," 257). For such needs, Jews utilized the same roadways and waterways as did Christians and Muslims, if often with added restrictions.

<sup>35</sup> Ben-Shalom, "Communication and Propaganda," 192-199. Such messengers named in *Minḥat Qena'ot* are Mordecai of Barcelona, Sasson b. Meir of Barcelona, and Jacob b. Judah of Beaucaire (de Bilqieri). Mordecai, whom Abba-Mari describes as a *nikhbad*, was entrusted with bringing the initial letter of support from Barcelona, with its sixteen signatories, to ban proponents in Montpellier (MQp 20, p. 59 / MQd 38, p. 409, l. 1).

<sup>36</sup> MQp 67, p. 138 / MQd 86, pp. 788, ll. 8-12.



Due to the success of this campaign, Ibn Adret tasked Sasson with doing the same more widely—as Sasson had done previously, in the 1290s controversy sparked by Solomon Petit:

He [Ibn Adret] asked me to do a good deed and be the messenger in this matter, just as I had done a good deed by being the messenger and traveling to Castile and Navarre and to all the rest of the communities on the matter of the *nagid* Rabbi David [Maimuni], the son of the Great Eagle, our master Moses [Maimonides] of blessed memory; and I collected on his behalf five thousand silver *tournois* [Tours pounds].<sup>37</sup>

Jacob b. Judah de Bilqieri, the brother of Todros, who had from the inception of the controversy acted as Abba-Mari's chief operative, took over his brother's role when Todros passed away, as mentioned in Chapter 1.<sup>38</sup> Jacob undertook a campaign remarkably similar to Sasson's, traveling throughout Occitania to garner support for the ban. Jacob records that he went "from house to house, corner to corner, neighborhood to neighborhood," gathering support by his personal stature and persuasion as well as by showing the letters he carried to the residents.<sup>39</sup> His campaign was apparently successful: Abba-Mari eventually received signed letters of support from Argentière, Capestang, Aix, and Lunel.<sup>40</sup> On one occasion, Abba-Mari hired a messenger to orally spread pronouncements in favor of a ban: he reports, "I commanded the messenger to call all the aristocrats (*nikkbadim*), who are known as *meṣuḥadim*, to attend a meeting of the leaders of the community."<sup>41</sup> A messenger was also dispatched from Barcelona to nearby Iberian cities to garner support for the ban proposal, as indicated by Ibn Adret's irritable comment to Abba-Mari and

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<sup>37</sup> MQp 67, p. 138 / MQd 86, pp. 788-789, ll. 16-19. David Maimuni was the grandson of Maimonides, the son of Maimonides' son Abraham.

<sup>38</sup> On Todros's death, see the headnote to MQp 53, p. 111 / MQd 72, p. 599, ll. 1-3.

<sup>39</sup> MQp 53, p. 115 / MQd 72, p. 696-697, ll. 179-180.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob b. Judah describes his route in great detail, MQp 53, p. 115 / MQd 72, pp., ll. 156-170.

<sup>41</sup> MQp 21, p. 62 / MQd 39, p. 418, ll. 53-54.

Todros upon their failure to propose the text of the ban themselves: “If only I had in hand that document which I’d requested that you send me; as far I know our messenger has already departed for the holy communities, to alert them of our decision.”<sup>42</sup> Such aspects of the messenger’s role illustrate the function of the letter within the community as a means of effecting change.

In addition, the personal integrity of a messenger was necessitated by his role in restricting access to sensitive information, which required discretion in delivering the letter, as noted above. Nowhere in *Minḥat Qena'ot* is this plainer than in the instructions given to the up-and-coming student Mordecai when he was entrusted with delivering the aforementioned initial letter from Barcelona to Montpellier. It was Mordecai who was instructed to first give the letter to Abba-Mari and Todros de Bilqieri, who would then feel out the potential response before reading it to the entire community assembled for Shabbat services. As discussed, if they felt that its contents were unacceptable to the community, they were to conceal the letter on the instructions of Barcelona.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as described in Chapter 1, the contents of the letter set off a firestorm of controversy, for which Abba-Mari would effusively apologize to Barcelona; it may well be that Abba-Mari’s judgment at this juncture did not match Ibn Adret’s intentions, and that in fact he miscalculated in releasing the contents of the letter.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps because of the sensitivity of the situation and the outcry it engendered, in writing the headnote to the letter months or years later, Abba-Mari

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<sup>42</sup> MQp 71, p. 141 / MQd 90, p. 599, ll. 16-17. It seems, then, that the Barcelona *qahal* could hire a messenger to go out to other communities of the region.

<sup>43</sup> MQp 21, p. 60 / MQd 39, p. 415, ll. 1-15.

<sup>44</sup> MQp 25, pp. 68-70 / MQd 44, pp. 440-444 and MQp 26, pp. 70-71 / MQd 45, pp. 444-448. See also Chapter 1.

emphasizes the care with which he obtained access to the letter and the punctiliousness with which Mordecai delivered it. Abba-Mari is at pains to point out that Mordecai's mission is, halakhically speaking, already assumed to be complete at the time he arrived at Abba-Mari's doorstep (under the principle *ḥezqat shaliaḥ 'oseh sheliḥuto*).<sup>45</sup> He also emphasizes that although Mordecai was truthfully conveying the permission of the Barcelona *beit din* for them to read it first, nevertheless he and Todros "pulled back our hands from opening the letter until the messenger [Mordecai] opened it himself, and [only] then did we read it out and punctiliously consider the words of the letter."<sup>46</sup> Why the hesitation? Todros and Abba-Mari were faced with an ethically ambiguous situation: although Mordecai had oral instruction to allow them to unseal and read the letter prior to the communal gathering, its proper "addressee" was the entire *qahal*. Ram Ben-Shalom suggests that Abba-Mari and Todros "were very sensitive to the ethics of their opening a letter addressed to the entire community; although from a halakhic standpoint the verbal message carried by the messenger was tantamount to permission to open the letter, the two refused to open it themselves, and the messenger eventually opened it for them."<sup>47</sup> In other words, although there was a great deal of potential benefit to be derived from opening the letter, and although they had the halakhic imperative and explicit permission to do so, Abba-Mari is interested in portraying himself and Todros as taking every precaution to handle the matter appropriately and fairly. What made their action appropriate was that they waited (practically sitting on their hands, it would seem) until the

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<sup>45</sup> On *ḥezqat shaliaḥ*, see Eirubin 31b, the Rif to Shabbat 47b, and the Rosh to Eirubin 3:3, and cf. Bava' Qama' 113a.

<sup>46</sup> MQp 21, p. 60 / MQd 39, p. 415, ll. 5-8.

<sup>47</sup> Ben-Shalom, "Communication and Propaganda," 192. This is also Dimitrovsky's view; see p. 415, n. 6.

messenger “authenticated” their access by unsealing the letter himself. They then read it together. Both the care Abba-Mari takes in relaying these events and the explicitness of the instructions given to Mordecai demonstrate the degree to which letters were living documents used in real ways, under the mediation of a messenger.

In the absence of a personal ally or other reliable member of the community, ban opponents hired individuals to act as messengers at considerable expense, due, perhaps, to the sensitivity of the position. The cost factor is underscored by Ibn Adret, who writes to his student in Perpignan:

When your letter reached me, a messenger was standing at my back, since he is hired. And this courier of my letters is practically on the way, so I will not be able to wait until I respond to all your queries, and suspect rather that another [messenger] will convey those to you.<sup>48</sup>

This process was costly enough that Ibn Adret preferred to send a brief reply and wait until the next opportunity arose before dispatching a lengthier response.<sup>49</sup> The caution surrounding the dispatch of sensitive materials show the degree to which the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters are documents with which people interacted.

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<sup>48</sup> MQp 17, p. 56 / MQd 35, p. 396, ll. 13-15. The author of this letter is unnamed; Abba-Mari refers to him as a “leading student” of Ibn Adret in Perpignan (“והיה שם בעיר [פרפניין] תלמיד ותיק מתלמידי הרב” ll. 3-4). This suggests that hired messengers would deliver a letter and then wait at the addressee’s home until they had written a response, which the messenger would then relay to the original sender.

<sup>49</sup> Ben-Shalom interprets this statement as reflecting widespread contemporary communication processes: “In cases involving special [i.e., hired] messengers, they were expected to wait for a reply and return it to the sender; the replies were written briefly, so as not to waste time and money. Longer responses were prepared in advance and sent by travelers” (“Communication and Propaganda,” 191).

The sensitivity and importance of the information borne in letters also meant that public meetings could be convened around the arrival of a letter.<sup>50</sup> Upon receiving the letter from the Barcelona *nikhbadim*, Abba-Mari reports that he and Todros de Bilqieri “appointed a time on Shabbat in the month of Elul in the year 1304, on which to hold a meeting of the communal leaders in the synagogue for the purpose of reading the letter so that they may hear it.”<sup>51</sup> This meeting proved a pivotal event in the course of the controversy, during which Jacob b. Makhir defended the Occitan rationalist tradition and garnered the support of a faction (*'agudah*) of the assembled community.<sup>52</sup> This meeting thus became a significant event in the life of the community, a site of discussion, dissention, and civic-political action.<sup>53</sup> Later in the course of the controversy, Ibn Adret reports that he brought the text of the ban before the Barcelona *qahal*, which accepted it in a community meeting that took place on the Shabbat of Parashat Devarim (31 July 1305).<sup>54</sup> These practices are in keeping with what is known about non-sacral uses of synagogue

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<sup>50</sup> This practice reflects the central, if much transformed, role that orality played in the social and intellectual culture of c. 1300; see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3-11; and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), 78-116.

<sup>51</sup> MQp 21, p. 60 / MQd 39, p. 415, ll. 13-15.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the events of the meeting, as well as a broader discussion of synagogue meetings, see Chapter 3.

<sup>53</sup> MQp 21, p. 61 / MQd 39, p. 418-419, ll. 53-68.

<sup>54</sup> MQp 71, p. 141 / MQd 90, p. 599, ll. 13-16.

space, including the sometimes contentious interactions that occurred between members of different social classes.<sup>55</sup> Goitein summarizes the evidence of the Cairo genizah:

Since everything done by or for the “Holy Congregation” was hallowed with a religious connotation, the synagogue was also the proper place for attending to communal affairs. The letters of the ecumenical or territorial authorities or of other communities, near and far, were read out, discussed, and acted upon; resolutions proposed by the elders or by an individual leader were acclaimed or rejected; bans were pronounced and public chastisements, such as stripes, were administered; collections were solicited, vows for donations were made, and reports about public finances or other matters rendered during or immediately after the service or between prayers...In short, all matters of public concern...were normally transacted in the synagogue, in conformity with age-old, even pre-Christian usage...and the Muslim house of worship, the mosque, was its counterpart. Special invitations to meet in the synagogue for deliberations on public affairs have been found in the genizah.<sup>56</sup>

There are several instances in *Minḥat Qena'ot* in which letters are read aloud in the synagogue, or other events related to the controversy are publicly discussed, typically on Shabbat following communal prayer.<sup>57</sup> This fits with the findings of Joseph Shatzmiller, who has described five instances of public quarrels breaking out in the synagogue of Manosque (in eastern Occitania) following communal announcements between 1292 and 1338, based on archival documents.<sup>58</sup> He

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<sup>55</sup> That is, at least until the growth of urban communities in the later Middle Ages, when socially-stratified synagogues became more commonplace; see Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London and Portland, Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 213-215.

<sup>56</sup> Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:165.

<sup>57</sup> In addition to the reading of the first communal letter from Barcelona, see MQp 33 / MQd 52.2; MQp 68 / MQd 87; and MQp 71 / MQd 90; MQp ps-88 / MQd 99.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Shatzmiller, “*Tumultus et Rumor in Sinagoga*: An Aspect of Social Life of Provençal Jews in the Middle Ages,” *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 2 (1977): 227-255. See also Septimus’ reconstruction of synagogue interactions in *Piety and Power*, 199-201. An early description of rival factions competing for dominance by proxy of synagogue space is preserved in *Kol-Bo* no. 142 (Naples or Venice, 1490 or 1491/2); English translation in Michael Walzer et al., eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition, Vol. 1: Authority* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 392-396. Though the *Kol-Bo* is probably contemporaneous with *Minḥat Qena'ot* and of Occitan provenance, the events described in no. 142 are likely much older. On the

presents the Manosque synagogue as typical of those found in the region and period, which functioned as the “place where the members of the ‘holy community’ managed their communal affairs: levying taxation, enacting regulations and contracts, proclaiming excommunication and ostracizing individuals and groups.”<sup>59</sup> Shatzmiller notes that Qalonymos b. Qalonymos also describes the synagogue at Arles c. 1300 as a place of social meeting and dissention.<sup>60</sup> Public letters, then, were usable documents: they were read aloud, talked about, copied, and considered in the governance of a community.

#### WRITING STYLE AND FUNCTIONALITY

Because they were a public form of writing, the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters are written in a high register that, paradoxically, complicates their transmission of information with its ornate, figurative language.<sup>61</sup> Nearly all the letter texts consist of rhymed prose replete with biblical allusions in the

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provenance of the first edition of the *Kol-Bo*, see Adriaan K. Offenberg, “The Dating of the Kol Bô: Water Marks and Hebrew Bibliography,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 6 (1972): 86-106, reprinted in his *A Choice of Corals: Facets of 15<sup>th</sup> Century Hebrew Printing* (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: De Graaf, 1992), where he suggests that the book was most likely printed at Naples in 1491/2, though the evidence is inconclusive.

<sup>59</sup> Shatzmiller, “*Tumultus*,” 228.

<sup>60</sup> Shatzmiller, “*Tumultus*,” 233-238. The passage is in Qalonymos b. Qalonymos, אבן בורח, edited by A. M. Habermann (Tel Aviv, 1956), 23-29. Meanwhile, in Egypt, a responsum by the nagid Joshua b. Abraham (II) Maimon (1310-1355), a great-great-grandson of Maimonides, requests within the text that it be read aloud after prayers (presumably Shaḥarit) on three consecutive days, Thursday through Shabbat. See Menache, “Communication in the Jewish Diaspora,” 24; Mark R. Cohen, “Correspondence and Social Control in the Jewish Communities of the Islamic World: A Letter of the Nagid Joshua Maimonides,” *Jewish History* 1-2 (1986): 39-48.

<sup>61</sup> The length of the controversy also allows for the comparison of the writers’ styles over a period of time, and though for the most part their style is consistent, there are several instances where Ibn Adret is more effusive than usual, as in his response to Samuel b. Reuben of Béziers, who had written an apologetic letter to Ibn Adret. Surprisingly, perhaps, Ibn Adret responds kindly and at length (MQp 42, pp. 93-96 / MQp

*melizah* style of post-Andalusi Hebrew literature.<sup>62</sup> Rarely do they report events, present arguments, or give opinions directly. This also reflects contemporaneous letter-writing practices, which not only embraced but mandated obfuscatory rhetoric; letter-writing was sufficiently important an activity that formal training in its rhetorical style became a feature of the educational curriculum.<sup>63</sup>

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61, pp. 537-548). As for Abba-Mari, he emerges a competent writer of the type of prose expected of someone of his station, a prerequisite for the type of communal activity he was undertaking; he is noticeably skillful in the relative clarity of his writing. Others of his colleagues were less effective communicators while utilizing the effusive style appreciated by aristocrats—see for example the letters of Shelemiah de Lunel (MQd 52.1, pp. 470-475, ll. 8-75 [absent from MQp]) and Todros b. Judah de Bilqieri (MQp 53, pp. 111-115 / MQd 72, pp. 599-616).

<sup>62</sup> On this body of literature, see Hayyim Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France* [Hebrew], edited by Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997); Ezra Fleischer, תחנות בהתפתחות השיר הלירי בספרד הנוצרית ובפרובאנס (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986); Jonathan Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between Al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007); Dan Pagis, *Change and Tradition in the Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1976); and Aharon Mirsky, "Hebrew Literary Creation," in *The Sephardi Legacy*, edited by Haim Beinart, 147-87 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 179-187.

In the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters, the rhymed sections are of various lengths, from two to five cola, as common in the literary style of the period. On the number of rhyming lines in *melizah*, see Raymond P. Scheindlin's introduction to a section from Solomon Ibn Saqbel's *Mahberet Ne'um Asher ben Yehudah*, "Asher in the Harem," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, edited by David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 254.

<sup>63</sup> The conventional, ornamental style of formal letters has been recognized as part of the literary culture of the aristocratic classes living under Islam. Young men were taught how to compose the stylized opening greetings and that typically began correspondence, and relatively many formulas and exemplars of letters have been found in the Cairo genizah: Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:180-181; Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 56; and Sylvia Schein, "Between East and West: The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and Its Jewish Communities as a Communication Center (1099-1291)," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, 24. This was later carried into post-Andalusi culture in Iberia and areas under its influence: see Pagis's thoughtful assessments of post-Andalusi stylistic developments in, *inter alia*, *Change and Tradition*, 185 and *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 35. Schirmann considers the art of letter-writing an important aspect of Iberian social culture; he remarks, "One who wished to dedicate himself to this pursuit needed to devote much time to learning the intricacies of epistolary style" (*History of*



Abba-Mari evinces an awareness of the literary convention which governs the discourse, in several places describing the act of writing a letter with the trope of “girding oneself with words” as one would with a sword, familiar from the Hebrew literary tradition.<sup>64</sup> In his general introduction, Abba-Mari expressed his call to action thus: “because of these [transgressions], my heart shall wield the sword of rhetoric” (*‘al ken libi ḥerev ha-melizah yenofef*).<sup>65</sup> In his initial letter to Ibn Adret, he pleads, “Gird your sword upon your thigh...and let it be the sword of your rhetoric (*ḥerev melizatkha*), flashing in the faces of the scholars of this land.”<sup>66</sup> Abba-Mari writes in the headnote to Ibn Adret’s initial letter to Crescas Vidal, “the Rabbi girded his rhetoric upon his thigh” (*ḥagar ha-rav melizato ‘al yarekh*).<sup>67</sup> The deadly rhetoric required for these aggressive acts was learned, belletristic, and obscurantist.

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*Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 470). Later, collections of form letters for use as exemplars were collected into *‘agronim*, which enjoyed great popularity in the early modern period and beyond; the first printed *‘agron* is titled *‘Iggerot Shelomim* and was published in Augsburg in 1534: see Dan and Saenz-Badillos, “Letters and Letter-Writing,” 12: 673–674; and Haim Beinart, “אגרון עברי מספרד מן המאה הט”י,” *Sefunot* 5 (1961): 75–134.

<sup>64</sup> The trope is found in several places in the biblical text, e.g. Judges 3:16, in which Ehud girds his double-edged sword beneath his clothing and uses it in a surprise attack on the king of Moab. Taking up or girding oneself with *melizah* was a way of introducing a character’s speech (that is, moving from prose to verse) in the *maqāmah*, although taking up *mashal* is more common. Rhetoric as swordplay is also a trope appearing in poetry (e.g. Abraham ha-Bedarshi’s “עין עטך בבכות,” in Schirmann’s *Ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, 4:470; he also may have alluded to it in the title of his *magnus opus* on the subject of poets and poetry, *ha-Ḥerev ha-Mit’happekhet*, on which see below).

<sup>65</sup> MQp Intro., p. 3 / MQd Intro., p. 226, l. 15.

<sup>66</sup> MQp 1, p. 20 / MQd 19, p. 273, ll. 44–47.

<sup>67</sup> MQp 10, p. 44 / MQd 28, p. 359, l. 3–4. There are several other examples: “the sword of rhetoric was drawn from its sheath” (“והורק חרב המליצה מנרתקה,” MQp 23, p. 65 / MQ 41/42, p. 428, l. 33); “he fires the arrow of his rhetoric at our side” (“חץ מליצותי בצדנו יורה,” MQp 34, p. 79 / MQd 53, p. 488, l. 11); and note also Abba-Mari’s letter of apology to Moses b. Samuel b. Asher, in which he writes, “the torch of rhetoric shall shatter like lightning” (“ולפיד המליצה ירוצץ כבריקה,” MQp 19, p. 58 / MQd 37, p. 405, ll. 6–

For a demonstration of this literary style and strategy, consider a letter written by four Barcelona aristocrats (including Ibn Adret) to Abba-Mari, in which they declare their intent to stay out of Montpellier's affairs.<sup>68</sup> This letter arrived at a highly charged moment, when the Montpellier community was reeling from what many perceived to be Ibn Adret's attack on the integrity of its members and Barcelona's intervention in their jurisdiction.<sup>69</sup> The purpose of the letter was to diffuse tension by asserting that no ban was pending in Barcelona and that Montpellier's alleged transgressors were its own to deal with. None of this, however, was stated explicitly. The letter opens with a relatively effuse praise of Abba-Mari's machinations, in rhymed prose:

Your intention is desirable and your actions are desirable, and they should be viewed as though the watchmen<sup>70</sup> and prophets themselves dictated them. If only they were inscribed in people's hearts, which would be distanced from the bosom of the books of the nations from whose breasts they suckle.<sup>71</sup>

The latter line is a typical belletristic play on the similar-sounding roots *ḥ-q-q*, "law, ordinance; to legislate, engrave, write" *r-ḥ-q*, "distant; to distance," and *ḥ-y-q*, "bosom, lap"; also typically, it employs the metaphor of suckling at the breast to make a point about the significance of education

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7) and Moses' response, in which he uses the phrase "the ax of your rhetoric" ("גִּרְזֹן מְלִיצוֹתַי"), MQp 37, p. 82 / MQd 56, p. 500, l. 71.

<sup>68</sup> This letter is MQp 31, pp. 76-77 / MQd 50, pp. 466-468. In addition to Ibn Adret, it is signed by Solomon b. Moses Ḥen (Gracian) Jacob b. Ḥasdai, and Jacob b. Shealtiel.

<sup>69</sup> The perceived attack came from the Barcelona letter MQp 20 / MQd 38; ban opponents responded with a letter to Barcelona (MQp 24, pp. 66-68 / MQd 43, pp. 431-440) which evidently alarmed the Barcelona *qahal* with the divisiveness it reported. This is suggested by the two apologetic letters sent by Abba-Mari to Barcelona in the aftermath of the opponents' letter, in which he pledges to right the *mahloqet* (MQp 25, pp. 68-70 / MQd 44, pp. 440-444 and MQp 26, pp. 70-71 / MQd 45, pp. 448-454). See Chapter 1 for a broader discussion.

<sup>70</sup> I.e., prophets; this usage of "צופים" occurs in Ezekiel 23:7 and later in Shabbat 104a.

<sup>71</sup> MQp 31, pp. 76-77 / MQd 50, pp. 467, ll. 4-6.

in forming a person's character. Then, the Barcelona aristocrats inform Abba-Mari that they wish to limit their involvement, though in literary fashion: "Although we have hastened as shock-troops to request supplication on behalf of your holy community, to remove the legs of the people from the snares...what use is there for us to continue shouting when there is no one to hear us?"<sup>72</sup>

Literally constructed from a string of allusions to Bible verses (Numbers 32:17, Daniel 9:3, Hosea 9:8, and Judges 18:33 and 20:16), this statement represents the transgressive potential in allegorical preaching as becoming entrapped in "snares," and efforts to enact a ban as "shouting." The meaning is clear enough, though never stated in a straightforward fashion: Barcelona doesn't feel that Montpellier is receptive to its involvement, and aside from prayers of good will, there is little they can do to prevent people from errors in thinking ("snares") that derive from reading philosophy. For the most part, events of the controversy must be teased out from behind the manifold allusions and belletristic rhetoric like that in the passage cited above. (This is one reason that Abba-Mari's editorial notes are so useful: they are written in straight prose and convey a great deal of the data that can be extracted from the text.)

The *melizah* style adopted for nearly all of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters suggests not only their highly public nature, which required elegant prose, but also the authors' intent to situate them within a literary tradition.<sup>73</sup> There is precedent for this in the writing of one of Abba-Mari's most prominent, senior countrymen, the Occitan poet and communal figure Abraham b. Isaac ha-

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<sup>72</sup> MQp 31, p. 77 / MQd 50, pp. 467, ll. 7-10

<sup>73</sup> In fact, the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters demonstrate that rhymed prose was not reserved for aesthetic writing, such as the *maqāmāh* which enjoyed such widespread popularity in Abba-Mari's day, but employed for communicative, polemic, and other public functions. Note, however, that halakhic matters and practical details are usually conveyed in ordinary (unrhymed) prose throughout the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters.

Bedarshi (c. 1230–c. 1300). Abraham seems to have been an exemplary letter-writer in the years prior to the controversy instigated by Abba-Mari; according to Ḥayyim Schirmann, he was in fact a professional writer of letters who was hired to compose what might be termed official letters on behalf of his adopted community of Perpignan.<sup>74</sup> A doyen of the Occitan school of poetry, Abraham would capture the literary world of his day in his lengthy poem *ha-Herev ha-Mit'happekhet*, which implied rich dialogue among poets.<sup>75</sup> While most of the poems Abraham sent to his colleagues were literary in purpose, poetic exchanges were not necessarily concerned with aesthetics and could address contemporary events.<sup>76</sup> Meshullam b. Solomon da Piera (*En Vidas de*

<sup>74</sup> Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 470. Among those that survive are letters written on behalf of needy petitioners and asking for financial assistance on behalf of the community. A letter from the Perpignan *qahal* to Barcelona asking them to appeal to the bishop of Huesca to intervene to uphold the privileges previously granted to Perpignan may also be the work of Abraham. See J. Bergmann, “Aus den Briefen Abraham Bedarsi's,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 42 (1898): 507–517; Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek Ms. hebr. 72 (Vienna; formerly Hofbibliothek Ms. 108). A sizeable excerpt is translated in Baer, *History*, 1:162. On the 1267 confiscation, see Baer, *History*, 1:158–159.

Schirmann also notes that Abraham's letters were collected as exemplars (*Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 470–471). Incidentally, Abraham's earliest known writing is a rhymed-prose work, possibly a letter, titled *בהתפש תורת אלהינו*, apparently written about the 1267 confiscation of Jewish books for censorship in Aragon—an example of the use of *melizab* to capture contemporary events prior to *Minḥat Qena'ot*. On this work, see D. Rettig, *Abraham Bedarschi's Elegie über die Konfiszierung des Talmuds in Frankreich* (Berlin, 1929); Rettig considers it to refer to the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242. On literary responses to book burnings, see Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 70–99.

<sup>75</sup> *Ha-Herev ha-Mit'happekhet* was first published with the extensive notes by S. D. Luzzato in *ספר חותם* כודש, edited by Gabriel Isaac Polak and Moritz Steinschneider (Amsterdam: I. Levisson, 1865). This edition includes poems written to Abraham by Isaac ha-Gorni as well.

<sup>76</sup> Abraham exchanged poetic letters with literary figures of his day, including Isaac b. Abraham ha-Gorni, Pinḥas ha-Levi, and Eleazar Ezovi, who was almost certainly the brother of Abraham's teacher, Yehosef b. Ḥanan Ezovi. His most extensive correspondence was initiated when Todros b. Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia passed through Perpignan with the delegation of Alfonso X of Castile in 1275. *El rab* Don Todros—not to be confused with his famously libertine relative, the poet Todros b. Judah ha-Levi Abulafia—was to exchange many poems with Abraham. On this exchange, see Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 472–473; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:119; and Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *A*

Gerona, fl. 1230s) circulated a series of satirical poems against the rationalists of the 1230s controversy, an instance of public writing at once literary and polemical.<sup>77</sup> In fact, James Lehmann maintains that one of Meshullam's poems in particular should be understood as "a burlesque of Naḥmanides' Epistle," a direct literary response to a letter written by Moses b. Naḥman (Ramban,

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*History of Medieval Spain* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975], 374-375). On the exchange with Isaac ha-Gorni, see Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 488-498 and Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 21. On the exchange with Eleazar Ezovi, see Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 471. On the exchange with Pinḥas ha-Levi, see Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 473, n. 19 and 480-481. (At least two manuscripts of poems by Abraham ha-Bedarshi include a literary exchange between Abraham and a Pinḥas ha-Levi: British Library Ms. Add. 27168, London, and Russian National Library Ms. Evr. II A 105/1, St. Petersburg. Abraham also mentions a Pinḥas ha-Levi in *Herev ha-Mit'happekhet*. This may or may not be the same Pinḥas ha-Levi who corresponded with Todros b. Judah ha-Levi Abulafia around the same time, on which see directly below. Incidentally, a Joseph b. Pinḥas ha-Levi, possibly a son or other relative, appears in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, dispatched from Montpellier to Perpignan as a messenger between Abba-Mari and Moses b. Samuel b. Asher, MQp 19, p. 59 / MQp 37, p. 408.)

Other poetic correspondences, all from Iberia and often preserved in *dīwāns*, include the poetic debate between Todros b. Judah ha-Levi Abulafia (1247-1306) and a Pinḥas ha-Levi, whose identity is contested; the exchange between Solomon da Piera and Joseph b. Lavi, part of the circle mentioned above in the context of polemical exchange; and the poems addressed to members of the public preserved in the self-edited *dīwān* of Samuel b. Joseph Ibn Sasson. On the exchange between Todros Abulafia and Pinḥas ha-Levi, comprised of thirty-five short poems and included in Todros's *dīwān*, see Angel Sáenz-Badillos, "Hebrew Invective Poetry: The Debate between Todros Abulafia and Phinehas Halevi," *Prooftexts* 16 (1996): 49-73. Sáenz-Badillos discusses the identity of this Pinḥas on pp. 59-50; Schirmann, in *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 410-411, n. 154. On the exchange between Solomon da Piera and Joseph b. Lavi, see Judit Targarona Borrás and Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Literary Correspondence between Vidal Benvenist Ben Lavi and Solomon Ben Meshullam De Piera," *Revue des études juives* 160, no. 1-2 (2001): 61-76. On Ibn Sasson, see Ross Brann, Angel Sáenz-Badillos, and Judit Targarona, "The Poetic Universe of Samuel Ibn Sasson, Hebrew Poet of Fourteenth-Century Castile," *Prooftexts* 16, no. 1 (1996): 75-103. Ibn Sasson's *dīwān* is titled ספר אבני השוהם and includes eighty-two poems and a rhymed-prose narrative about contemporary Castilian Jewry.

<sup>77</sup> On this exchange, see James H. Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy," *Prooftexts* 1 (1981): 133-151. Lehmann argues that a contextual reading of Meshullam's anti-Maimonidean poems demonstrates that the poet did not defect to the rationalist side, as traditionally thought. Meshullam's poems are not preserved as part of an exchange, but they are clearly public documents disseminated in a manner similar to epistles. They are, rather, preserved in the form of a *dīwān*, with headnotes in Judeo-Arabic; forty-nine poems are extant, first published by Ḥayyim (Heinrich) Brody, "The Poetry of Meshullam da Piera" [Hebrew], ידיעות המכון לחקר השירה העברית בימי הביניים 4 (1938).

Nahmanides, 1194-1270) to the leaders of northern France.<sup>78</sup> These public usages of epistolary writing in the developed literary style of the post-Andalusi period represent a form of idea-sharing and public discussion which inevitably served as a model for the discourse instigated by Abba-Mari.

#### THE COMPILATION OF *MINḤAT QENA'OT*

Abba-Mari shaped the letters he gathered from the controversy with great care into a structured, accessible record, indicating his conviction that a debate of ideas was significant, worthy of preservation, and potentially useful to those who would attempt to limit the study of philosophy. His editorship was not limited to collecting and arranging the letters he possessed—a difficult task in itself—but also to contextualizing the letters by means of headnotes and an introductory essay. In fact, without Abba-Mari's editorial additions, the contents of the letters would have been considerably more difficult to understand because the circumstances in which they were produced and received would have been lost. In analyzing his headnotes, it must be remembered that Abba-Mari wrote these several months to years after the individual letters were composed and sent, and that the letters themselves span a period of almost two years and were in various states at the time that Abba-Mari copied them into his book. His editorial work was a substantive addition to the primary sources he collected, bespeaking the importance he placed on creating an effective text that would enable further discussion.

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<sup>78</sup> Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire," 141-148. The poem, no. 49 in Brody edition (pp. 114-115), is given the title "In Praise and Defense of the *Guide*," apparently by an editor of Meshullam's *dīwān* who did not know the poet's identity. Nahmanides' letter is titled טרם אענה אני שוגג (after Ps. 119:67) and is published in כתבי הרמב"ן, edited by Ḥayyim Dov Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), 1:336-351.

Abba-Mari's compilation and ordering of the extensive letter exchange is the product of obvious attentiveness, especially to matters of chronology.<sup>79</sup> From a jumble of letters, most without dates and many overlapping in time as they wound their course across the Pyrenees, he creates a harmonious order that allows for greater comprehension on the part of the reader.<sup>80</sup> An excellent example of the complexity of organizing the letters chronologically is captured in an extended headnote which occurs among the late letters, immediately after the long-awaited text of the Barcelona ban.<sup>81</sup> In this headnote, Abba-Mari explains that his written response to the ban had been substantially delayed, and before he had had the chance to dispatch his letter of reply, several additional letters arrived to him from the Barcelona *qabal*. The six letters that follow that headnote are ostensibly all or some of those that arrived in the interim, before he could send his reply.<sup>82</sup> Here, we see Abba-Mari faced with the task of ordering of a pile of the letters of support—letters that were not written as back-and-forth responses with an innate chronology. Specifically, he

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<sup>79</sup> On the most basic level, Abba-Mari is selecting letters for inclusion from among many possible extant letters, an aspect of his methodology that Abba-Mari explicitly acknowledges MQp 97, pp. 176-177 / MQd 117, p. 824, ll. 1-5.

<sup>80</sup> It appears that letters were not conventionally, or at least not uniformly, dated; with a few important exceptions, the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters must be ordered according to internal evidence.

<sup>81</sup> MQp 81(b) / MQd 102. As an extended headnote, this is designated a separate chapter by the paratextual apparatus. This is one of two such extended headnotes; cf. the headnote to MQp 36 / MQd 55, ll. 1-14. On ambiguity in the identification of the text of the Barcelona ban, see Chapter 1.

<sup>82</sup> Abba-Mari specifies that six letters arrived to him from Barcelona; however, he calls MQp 82 / MQd 103 "the first letter," MQp 83 / MQd 104 "the second letter," and then restarts the numbering again with MQp 84 / MQd 105, calling *this* letter "the first letter" of six. He refers to MQp 85-87 / MQd 106-108 as the second, third, fourth, and fifth letters, without specifying the sixth. It is therefore unclear whether MQp 82 / MQd 103 and MQp 83 / MQd 104 are two of the six letters that arrived on 12 Kislev, the other four having gone missing; or whether MQp 82 / MQd 103 through MQp 87 / MQd 108 are the six letters, which were at some point numbered incorrectly. Obviously the clarity achieved by Abba-Mari is of a relative degree.



possessed the group of six letters from Barcelona which arrived to him at the same time, following three important letters from Barcelona to which he did not respond.<sup>83</sup> This creates a block of nine letters whose chronological sequence and relationship to one another is quite confusing.

Recognizing the potential confusion, Abba-Mari decides to include specific data as clarification, something he rarely does. Thirty-six days after the arrival of the text of the Barcelona ban, he explains, and before he had had the chance to respond, six more letters arrived, on 12 Kislev 5066 (20 November 1305).<sup>84</sup> This type of detailed explanation not only shows Abba-Mari's awareness of the relevance of data, it also illuminates the compilation process, which required him to discern and communicate the sequence in which the letters were received in a way understandable to the book's reader.

The impact of the circumstances under which letters were written and conveyed affected Abba-Mari's editorial work as well. Abba-Mari had to do some work to collect even those letters that had at one time been in his hands. He explains to Ibn Adret,

Regarding the letters, please know that I truly am overseeing their copying as your eminence requested that I do, but I do not have them all in my possession. I am presently collecting them one by one from here and there, and there are some I have sent for from the places from which they were dispatched.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The group of six Barcelona letters consists of MQp 82 / MQd 103 through MQp 87 / MQp 108. The three Barcelona letters that precede them (in which the text of the Barcelona ban was included) are MQp ps-80 / MQd 99, MQp ps-81 / MQd 100, and MQp 81(a) / MQd 101. Following the six Barcelona letters, the coherence of the sequence of events breaks down; almost all of the remaining included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* are affirmations of support from various prominent Occitans or communities.

<sup>84</sup> This is according to Eduard Mahler, *Handbuch der jüdischen Chronologie* (Leipzig, 1916; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 568-569. Recall that Abba-Mari would have changed the *anno mundi* year at Rosh ha-Shannah, so that November 5066 is in Julian/Gregorian year 1305 while January 5066 is in 1306.

<sup>85</sup> MQp 69, p. 140 / MQd 88, p. 721, ll. 27-29.



It is clear here that letters were highly prized for the information they carried: Ibn Adret was frustrated not to be privy to them, and Abba-Mari apologetic that he was not able to deliver the information Ibn Adret was relying on him to send. Those letters that he could not gather from his colleagues and supporters, Abba-Mari had to request from the individuals who had written them.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, some letters are clearly incomplete; others lack their closing formalities or the signatures that were once appended to them. At times, Abba-Mari refers to letters he was never privy to, but whose contents were reported to him.<sup>87</sup> In one case, Abba-Mari found a short, perhaps fragmentary, letter whose author or place in the chronology of the exchange he could not recall.<sup>88</sup> He explains in the headnote, “A short, unsigned letter was also found by itself within the bundle of letters; I didn’t know for certain for whom it was intended.”<sup>89</sup> Abba-Mari decided to place it just after the initial exchange between himself and Ibn Adret, and before the start of the ban proponents’ public activity contra the Montpellier opponents of the ban.<sup>90</sup> In fact, this orphaned letter is referred to by its incipit in a later letter written by Shelemiah de Lunel, where it is revealed

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<sup>86</sup> This may imply that a letter-writer typically made a copy of his missive before dispatching it, or perhaps that he received the original with a response written directly on it.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, see Abba-Mari’s interesting reconstruction of the events preceding the exchange of the three letters MQd 52.1, 52.2, and 52.3 (of which only 52.3 occurs in all manuscripts, and in the Pressburg edition): “The response with which Rabbi Solomon [Shelemiah] replied to the letter sent to him by the Rabbi [Ibn Adret], beginning ‘From the time I was a youth until I became aged’ [MQp 30, p. 75 / MQd 49, p. 462, l. 6], was not available to me, and I was not able to determine or know what the content was. Also the response with which the Rabbi [Ibn Adret] replied to him after that I have no knowledge of, as it did not reach my hands. However, it was reported to me in no uncertain terms...” (MQp 33, p. 78 / MQd 52, p. 470, ll. 1-4).

<sup>88</sup> MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, pp. 358-359.

<sup>89</sup> MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, p. 358, ll. 1-2.

<sup>90</sup> The “public” stage of the controversy effectively began with Ibn Adret’s appeal to Crescas Vidal of Perpignan to publicize the matter, as discussed in Chapter 1.

to be the writing of Ibn Adret to Shelemiah: it is the same letter of Ibn Adret's to which Abba-Mari refers in the headnote to Letter 33/52.<sup>91</sup> This means that Letter 9/27 belongs chronologically just before 33/52; it dates later than Abba-Mari realized when he edited the letters c. 1307. This kind of internal evidence underscores that *Minḥat Qena'ot* is itself an imperfect copy of multiple original documents.<sup>92</sup> More importantly, it demonstrates that letters were highly valued and hence tended to be kept by whoever was able to get his hands on them, and thus needed to be actively collected in order to be compiled into the type of anthology Abba-Mari was creating.<sup>93</sup>

The most significant of Abba-Mari's contributions as editor is his writing of the extra-epistolary "headnotes," comments that he added to the letters after he copied and arranged them to

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<sup>91</sup> Shelemiah's identification of MQp 9 / MQd 27 by incipit occurs in MQd 52.1, p. 472, l. 30 [absent from MQP]; cf. MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, p. 358, l. 3. This letter, MQd 52.1, is not included in the Pressburg edition and is absent in four or the seven extant manuscripts of *Minḥat Qena'ot* (it is attested in Ms. Montefiore 271, private collection [ṛ], Ms. Cod. Parm. 2782, Biblioteca Palatina, Parma [ḡ], and Ms. Reggio 24, Bodleian Library, Oxford [ψ]). It is therefore unclear whether Abba-Mari simply overlooked Shelemiah's reference to the incipit of the orphaned letter (9/27), or whether he did not have Shelemiah's letter (52.1). If he didn't have Shelemiah's letter (MQd 52.1), then a later editor must have added it in. For a detailed explanation of the letter exchange in which this identification occurs, see the discussion of the public quarrel between Shelemiah and Abba-Mari in Chapter 1.

<sup>92</sup> See e.g. the manuscript variants at the end of Todros de Bilqieri's letter to Barcelona, MQd 40, p. 424, *apparatus criticus* to l. 55. One of these is printed, enclosed in parentheses, in MQp 22, p. 64. These suggest a situation similar to the one described here.

<sup>93</sup> An additional possibility must be considered regarding Abba-Mari's omission of his opponents' letters. Rather than purposely silencing the voices of the ban opponents, it may be that Abba-Mari did not have access to most of their letters. It is evident that he had at least some access to them, since he quotes directly from a letter by an unnamed Montpellier ban opponent in one headnote (MQp 49, p. 104 / MQd 68, PP., ll. 4-6). As discussed above, however, the headnotes frequently allude to the lengths taken to keep the letters out of the hands of unsympathetic persons; thus it may be that Abba-Mari was hard-pressed to obtain copies of ban opponents' writings.

explain the circumstances surrounding their writing, purpose, or receipt.<sup>94</sup> Abba-Mari's role as an actor in the events recorded in the letters provides him with the necessary knowledge to edit them into a book arranged in logical order. In this capacity, Abba-Mari functions as an eyewitness, as he understands implicitly in undertaking the task. Abba-Mari was, likewise, very much aware of his role as editor: for instance, on the use of chapter divisions as a tool, Abba-Mari wrote in the general introduction, "I divided it [*Minḥat Qena'ot*] into chapters according to the number of letters, and queries, and responses, and the epistles of several of the Occitan aristocrats who hold to the Torah of the Lord."<sup>95</sup> In so doing, Abba-Mari transforms the letters into a history and a handbook for the like-minded. To this end, his headnotes aid the reader in understanding the context of a given letter without reading the entire work. However, they may also mislead the reader into accepting the narrative events described in the letters. By allowing a reader to turn to a page that records a given event, the book format betrays the original status of its constituent parts as idiosyncratic documents.

It is likely that Abba-Mari was building upon existing practices in writing the headnotes, perhaps the example of Meir b. Todros Abulafia's *Kitāb al-Rasā'il*, a record of the letters from an

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<sup>94</sup> In some cases, longer and more detailed headnotes were numbered as chapters in themselves, which appear in the Pressburg edition as "letters" when they are in fact later, post-1306 editorial notes. In several places Abba-Mari inserts comments elsewhere in the text, but that is usually because several letters have been included within one section, not because he is pausing in the middle of copying a letter to make a notation. Though many are quite short, a mere line indicating that author of the letter and where the text of the letter begins, most offer details about the events surrounding the letter; as such they are of great historical value. Some letters are not preceded by a headnote at all, but this is uncommon. Of Genette's terms, the one that comes closest to describing such headnotes is *peritext*; see *Paratexts*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>95</sup> MQp Introduction, p. 2 / MQd Introduction, p. 229, ll. 67-69.

early Maimonidean controversy (on which see below), and of the Judeo-Arabic poetry anthology.<sup>96</sup>

It is also possible that Abba-Mari's headnotes were influenced by independent developments in Hebrew book production.<sup>97</sup> Headnotes might be seen, especially by an Occitan subject to powerful influences from the north as well as south, as an expansion of explanatory subtitling or other remarks in responsa collections and in "form-books" like *Sefer ha-Shetarot* and *Kol-Bo*. Abba-Mari

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<sup>96</sup> On the *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* as a probable antecedent to *Minḥat Qena'ot*, see below. The *Kitāb* was plainly modeled on Islamic literary precedents, as its title indicates, their influence having stretched well beyond the Judeo-Arabic period in Iberia. Although Abulafia's Toledo was some one hundred and fifty years removed from Muslim rule, and his illustrious family originated in Burgos (which, though very much influenced by the cultural traditions of al-Andalus, was never under Muslim rule), Islamic influence on his writing practices is clear. The introduction of the *Kitāb*, for instance, was written in Arabic (the Judeo-Arabic text of the introduction was published by David Yellin in *Kiryat Sefer* 6 [1929-1930]). Such continued domination of Islamic culture has been demonstrated in its many aspects; Katrin Kogman-Appel has argued, for example, that illuminated Hebrew manuscripts produced in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Catalonia (including Perpignan) demonstrate "the continued existence of the Islamicizing visual language"; see her *Jewish Book Art between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 171-173.

In light of this, many of Abba-Mari's editorial additions may be considered to originate in Islamic writing practices, including the use of a prolegomenon, on which see below, as well as the headnotes. Headnotes were a standard feature of the poetic *dīwān*, preceding a poem and explaining the circumstances of its composition, usually in Arabic. Notably, such headnotes were written by the compiler of the *dīwān*, often a son or pupil who knew the poet personally and could ostensibly report on a given poem's background. Todros b. Judah ha-Levi Abulafia (1247-after 1298), who in post-classical fashion compiled his own *dīwān*, chose to write the headnotes in Arabic. (Todros Abulafia's *dīwān*, *גן המשלים והחידות*, is extant in two fragmentary manuscripts and one that is complete, British Library Ms. Or. 9659 (London), a facsimile of which was published by Moses Gaster as *The Garden of Apologues and Saws, being the Diwan of Don Tadros Halevi en Abu-Alafia* [London: E. Goldston, 1926]. A complete edition in three volumes was published by David Yellin [Jerusalem: Weiss, 1932-1936]. Schirrmann describes the rediscovery of Todros's *dīwān* in *Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain*, 388-391. On the influence of the "golden age" on Todros Abulafia, see Aviva Doron, *Todros ha-Levi Abulafia: A Hebrew Poet in Christian Spain* [Hebrew] [Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1989], 56.)

<sup>97</sup> Yet another interesting possibility is influence from contemporary collections of troubadour poetry, which sometimes included *vidas* and *razos* introducing poems. See Suzanne Fleischmann, "The *Vidas* and *Razos*," in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, edited by F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

thus utilizes established editorial practices to both clarify the events of the controversy and lead the reader to follow his own presentation of the narrative.

Second to the headnotes, the general introduction or prolegomenon is Abba-Mari's editorial attempt to control the narrative and provide a clear framing for his reader, explaining the work's purpose, the background that led him to initiate the correspondence, and how the work is arranged. In effect, the general introduction is a short essay on the controversy summarizing the views of ban proponents in light of Abba-Mari's assessment of their campaign for the ban.<sup>98</sup> Building upon his chosen title for his compilation (discussed below), he suffuses his introduction with the word "zeal," emphasizing the continued threat posed by open access to philosophy. He opens his work, with the statement, "I became zealous on behalf of God (*le-'Adonai qin'a qin'eti*)..."<sup>99</sup> He describes ban proponents as "those who wear zeal" and calls himself "the instigator and zealous one."<sup>100</sup> Excessive allegoresis is "the infuriating image that provokes zeal."<sup>101</sup> Once they

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<sup>98</sup> By the turn of the fourteenth century, the use of a prolegomenon was a standard feature of the Hebrew book, and Abba-Mari utilizes it to its full capacity. Jeffrey Woolf uses the composition of *Sefer ha-Roqeaḥ* by Eleazar b. Judah of Worms (c. 1165–c. 1230) as an example of the Ashkenazi book prior to the adoption of influences from Islamic intellectual culture in "Admiration and Apathy: Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in High and Late Medieval Ashkenaz," in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 427–453 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 431. See also Y.S. Spiegel, "השפעת היהודי מחברים ערבים על הספר היהודי," *Maḥanayim* 1 (1992): 132–143, cited by Woolf in this connection.

<sup>99</sup> MQp Intro., p. 3; MQd Intro., p. 225, ll. 5–6. The construct קנא קנאתי is lifted from 1 Kings 19:10, 14, while the rest of line echoes 1 Sam. 17:24 and Dan. 1:8.

<sup>100</sup> MQp Introduction, p. 1 / MQd Introduction, p. 226, ll. 24–25, 26.

<sup>101</sup> סמל הקנאה מקנה, lifted from Ezek. 8:3, which others translate, "the infuriating image that provokes fury" (JPS, 1999) or "the image of jealousy which provoketh jealousy" (JPS, 1917).

recognized his concerns, other aristocrats also “became greatly zealous.”<sup>102</sup> The language and implications are drawn from the archetypical zealot, the biblical Pinḥas, who is identified by his zeal on behalf of God (“Pinḥas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his zeal for me [*be-qan'o 'et qin'ati*]”); Pinḥas, moreover, is promoted by God to the office of priest, and granted the promise of eternal priesthood, as a result of his zealous killing of an Israelite consorting with a foreign, Midianite woman and worshipper of the god Ba'al-Pe'or, an act symbolically resonant with Abba-Mari's motivation.<sup>103</sup> Another narrative in which Pinḥas displays his trademark zeal is the war against Benjamin avenging the rape and murder of an Israelite concubine by men of the tribe, for which Pinḥas obtains God's consent.<sup>104</sup> In addition, rabbinic literature identifies Pinḥas with Elijah, who, in addressing God, twice describes his efforts against the worship of Ba'al with the signal words: “I am moved by zeal (*qano' qine'ti*) for the Lord, the God of Hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life”<sup>105</sup>—a self-description that resonates with the image Abba-Mari presents of his mission.

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<sup>102</sup> MQp Introduction, p. 1 / MQd Introduction, p. 227, l. 28.

<sup>103</sup> Numbers 25:1-13. The story is retold in Psalms 106:28-31. Additionally, Pinḥas the son of Eleazar is mentioned in several other parts of the Bible: Joshua 22:13; Judges 20:28; in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:35; and 1 Chronicles 9:20.

<sup>104</sup> Judges 20:28; the sequence of events are described in Judges 19-20.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Kings 18:10-14. On the identification of Pinḥas as Elijah, see Bava' Mezi'a 114a-b; *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 47; and *Yalqut Shimo'ni, Parashat Balaq*, 771; cf. *Targum Yonatan*, Exodus 4:13 and 6:18.

The title Abba-Mari chose for his book is, in itself, a polemical declaration which suggests that an expiation is needed for the sins of his opponents by invoking the “offering of zeal,” a term drawn specifically from the so-called ordeal of jealousy described in Numbers 5:11-31 and which, as evident from the introduction, had the particular connotation of righteous anger due to transgression in matters of belief and religious deviance (in the biblical context, of sexual misconduct).<sup>106</sup> Abba-Mari calls attention to his choice of title at the end of the general introduction: “As a name for my composition I designated it *An Offering of Zeal* so that it may be a

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<sup>106</sup> The title refers specifically to the biblical ordeal called *minḥat qena'ot*. This ordeal is intended to determine the culpability of a woman suspected of adultery, and forms the major topic of tractate Sotah. The *minḥat qena'ot*, an offering that takes the form of one-tenth of an *efah* of barley flour, is “a meal offering of jealousy, an offering of remembrance which recalls wrongdoing” (Num. 5:15). It is emphasized that no oil or frankincense be poured over the barley.” The commentator Rashi (Solomon b. Isaac, 1040–1105) understands this as a reflection of the wife’s sinfulness: they are withheld “so that the offering is not adorned”; see Rashi to Num. 5:15, s.v. *לא יצק עליו שמן*. Rashi suggests that the choice of barley flour as opposed to *solet* (fine wheat flour) reflects the animal nature of the wife’s sin (s.v. *שערים*). Rashi notes that the term *minḥat qena'ot* reflects the zeal aroused by the woman’s actions both in her husband and in God, a point echoed by Abraham Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides in their commentaries on the verse. The *qena'ot* offering follows an ordeal consisting of an abjuration that is delivered orally and then written down and immersed in a mixture of water and earth from the *Mishkan*, to be drunk by the accused woman. By the mishnaic period, the efficacy of the ordeal was considered to have abated and it was no longer practiced, making Abba-Mari’s allusion all the more barbed. See Sotah 9:9, “משרבו המנאפין, פסקו המים המאירים.”

To understand the message, something of an excursus into the meaning of *qin'ah* and of the *minḥat qena'ot* sacrifice is required. The root *q-n-* appears in many places in the biblical text and bears a double valance, indicating on the one hand righteous zeal for God and on the other, an intense jealousy instigated by sexual impropriety. That is, *qin'ah* may be destructive and insidious human jealousy or impassioned and aggressive zeal for the good and true. *Qin'ah* is also an attribute that can be imputed to God as well as to human beings (David L. Lieber and S. David Sperling in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Jealousy,” 11:98-99, following upon the insights made by Friedrich Kuechler in the article “Jahwe und sein Volk nach Jeremia,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 28, no. 2 (1908): 81-109). Within the Ḥumash, *q-n-* seems to be used mostly with the connotation of ardency, even stridency, for the sake of justice; the significance of the root *q-n-* seems to have been fixed in antiquity. The *Zohar*, first circulated some fifteen years prior to Abba-Mari’s work, employs the term *qin'ah* extensively in this connotation and mentions the *minḥat qena'ot* specifically in two places (3:12b and 3:96b).

guardian and an omen.”<sup>107</sup> His bold pronouncement in selecting the title *minḥat qena'ot* was that his opponents’ excesses—relying on astrology and magic, allegorizing biblical stories into abstraction, and studying foreign books of wisdom rather than authoritative scripture—was suspicious of the moral and intellectual equivalent of adultery. This was sufficiently serious a betrayal, Abba-Mari implies, that it required an ordeal of biblical proportion. In effect, Abba-Mari presents himself as the wronged husband, assuaging the guilt wreaked upon the family by means of this book, a *minḥat qena'ot*, through which Jewry would be tried by ordeal for going whoring after foreign knowledge. Because *qin'ah* generally and *minḥat qena'ot* in particular were used euphemistically, the use of the phrase as a book title appears several times after Abba-Mari completed *Minḥat Qena'ot*, most notably in a work of the same title by Abner of Burgos (Alfonso

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<sup>107</sup> MQp Intro., p. 4 / MQd Intro., p. 229, l. 65.



de Valladolid, c. 1270–c. 1340),<sup>108</sup> though Abner was not responding directly to Abba-Mari as did Yehiel (Vitale) Nissim da Pisa (d. 1574) in his own *Minḥat Qena'ot* in the fifteenth century.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Abner wrote his *Minḥat Qena'ot* after his conversion to Christianity in c. 1320, in response to a letter he received from his erstwhile pupil and friend, Isaac b. Joseph Ibn Pollegar (Pulgar, Policar, fl. first half of the fourteenth century); it has been preserved in Castilian, under the title *Ofrenda de Zelos* or *Libro del Zelo de Dios*, in a unique manuscript, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Ms. Lat. 6423 (Rome), published by Walter Mettmann in *Ofrenda de Zelos (Minḥat Kēna'ot) und Libro de la Ley: Ausgabe und Kommentar* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990). Abner was an anti-rationalist and a determinist stridently opposed to astrology, whose own “sin-offering” seems to have been intended on behalf of his former coreligionists who, mistakenly in his view, posited the existence of strong free will. See Jonathan L. Hecht, “The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid According to Parma MS 2440: *Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros* and *Teshuvot la-Meharef*” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1993), 42–43. See also Yitzhak Baer, “Abner of Burgos’ *Minbath Kena'oth* and Its Influence on Hasdai Crescas” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 11 (1940): 188–206. Alternately, as Colette Sirat suggests, the *qena'ot* of the title may reflect Abner’s rejection of the concept of zeal—that is, human will or effort—as meaningless (*A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* [Paris and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1985], 313).

<sup>109</sup> Yehiel, a scion of the Italian banking family, wrote his *Minḥat Qena'ot* in 1538, a treatise about the uncertainty of truth attained by human reasoning. Like the ban proponents of the early fourteenth century, Yehiel has no quarrel with reason when used correctly to aid human endeavor (astronomy, mathematics, medicine) while eschewing the application of Greek philosophical principles to matters of halakhah or theology. On Yehiel’s thought, see Herbert Davidson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus, 106–145 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 117–118. David Kaufmann, who edited and published Yehiel’s *Minḥat Qena'ot* in 1898 (with the subtitle “נגד אגרת התנצלותו של ר' ידעיה הפניני” [Berlin, 1898]), considers it a direct response to Yedayah ha-Penini’s *Ketav ha-Hitnazẖlut*. However, Yehiel’s work is also very much a product of its time, as Robert Bonfil has pointed out; rationalist philosophy in Yehiel’s day was much attenuated in comparison to the late Middle Ages, and his reservations thus have a milder tone, addressing concerns particular to Renaissance Italy. In fact, by selecting his title, Yehiel appears to be seeking to connect his work with the passions of an earlier era, rekindling and updating them for his own time and place. See *The Rabbinate in Renaissance Italy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979; reprint, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2005), 184; and Sirat, *History*, 410–411.

Following Yehiel’s *Minḥat Qena'ot*, two modern works also appropriate the term *qena'ot* in reference to ideational transgression. The anti-rationalist and anti-Sabbatean controversialist Jacob Emden, born in Altona and active in Amsterdam, titled a 1752 work *Torat ha-Qena'ot*. *Torat Qena'ot* was, like Abba-Mari’s *Minḥat Qena'ot*, an anthology of documents, this time recording Sabbatean activity. In light of Emden’s anti-rationalist stance and views on the Sabbatean movement, as well as the format of his work, it stands to reason that he was interested in connecting his views with activities of his predecessors. Interestingly, in the nineteenth century, Abraham Lichtenberg, an early editor of Maimonides’ responsa, adopted the term *qena'ot* in titling the third section of his *Qoveẖ Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-Iggerotav*. This section, composed of letters written by Maimonides’ followers in support of his writings, especially in the

Thus, by the time Abba-Mari compiled *Minḥat Qena'ot*, *qin'ah* was a code word, used repeatedly by supporters of Abba-Mari and Ibn Adret to express righteous anger.<sup>110</sup> The first to dub the controversy *milḥemet qena'ot* was Samuel b. Reuben, and by the time that Occitan communities began writing to Ibn Adret pledging their support, it was a byword of those who favored the institution of the ban.<sup>111</sup> Abba-Mari clearly seized upon the term and emphasizes it in his introduction in reference to transgressive ideas in Judaism, much in the way that the phrase *milḥamot 'Adonai* came to denote anti-Christian polemics in the thirteenth century and after.<sup>112</sup>

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wake of the controversy of the 1230s, appears there as *'Iggerot Qena'ot*. In this is a small echo of the afterlife of the anthology he assembled. For a study that compares the use of the same title for multiple works, though in the early modern period, see Marvin J. Heller, “*Adderet Eliyahu*: A Study in the Titling of Hebrew Books,” in *Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, edited by *idem.*, 72-91 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> Abba-Mari is mostly consistent throughout his writing in using *qin'ah* in its connotation of righteous anger or zeal for justice in religious matters, although in at least one place, *q-n-* is used unequivocally in the sense of destructive jealousy: speaking of his opponents, he says, “עבר עליהם רוח קנאה” (MQp 20, p. 62 / MQd 32, p. 416, l. 26). See below for more discussion of the biblical usage of *q-n-*.

<sup>111</sup> Samuel b. Reuben writes: “בין עירין וקדישין יעירו מלחמות, מלחמת קנאות קנאת סופרים, שורים ואריות זה,” MQp 41, p. 90/ MQ 60, p. 528, ll. 52-53. A good example of *qin'ah* as a byword is found in the letter from the Lunel *nikbbadim*, MQp 54, pp. 115-117 / MQd 73, pp. 616-623.

<sup>112</sup> On the use of *milḥamot 'Adonai* (Num. 21:14) in reference specifically to anti-Christian polemic, see Aryeh Grabois, “The Use of Letters as a Communication Medium Among Medieval European Jewish Communities,” in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, 97-98. Perhaps the earliest example is the Karaite Solomon b. Yeroḥam’s *Milḥamot 'Adonai*, a response to Se’adiah Ga’on. It is possible that Levi b. Gershom had this in mind when he chose the title for his philosophical masterwork, in the sense that his theological proofs answered common points of contention in the friars’ counter-Jewish missionary disputations. One of the central subjects of the work is the problem of free will versus divine omniscience, coming down on the side of strong free will (contra Abner of Burgos [Alfonso of Valladolid, c. 1270–1340]), on whom see below), although the topic of its first version was solely creation; on this, see Seymour Feldman, ed., *Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides)’s The Wars of the Lord*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984–1999), 1:37. It is certain that this was the title Levi b. Gershom chose for the work, since he mentioned it by this title in his supercommentary on Ibn Rushd’s *Epitome of the Physics*, which, he notes, was completed in 1321. Feldman suggests, “It would appear that Levi gave this title to his own book because it defends the Torah against the false opinion of Aristotle that the universe is eternal,” *ibid.*, 1:55-56. Isaac Ibn Arundi (fl. fourteenth century) is attested to have written a treatise arguing against Levi’s, also titled *Milḥamot 'Adonai*, which is not extant.

Other established bywords that Abba-Mari utilizes in the introduction includes the image of the scorpion (“may he be bitten by a scorpion”) and the metaphors of battle mentioned above (he writes that the “idiocy and heresy” of the rationalists “cause my heart to wave the sword of *melizab*”).<sup>113</sup> The use of such bywords helps to unify his work thematically. He thus orients the reader to the major points of contention, preparing them for a sympathetic reading of the letters he has collected, bolstered by the theological treatise, which offers Abba-Mari’s statement of what he considers the essential principles of faith, akin to Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles.<sup>114</sup>

#### PRECEDENTS

Though an unusual compilation, *Minḥat Qena'ot* has precedent among texts preserving ideas carried from community to community by means of written communication. The closest literary relative of *Minḥat Qena'ot* is the aforementioned *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* of Meir b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia (Ramah, c. 1170-1244).<sup>115</sup> Abulafia’s *Kitāb* is a collection of letters from an early

<sup>113</sup> “ע”כ לבי חרב המליצה ינופף” MQp Intro., p. 1 / MQd Intro., p. 226, l. 15. Instances of the scorpion metaphor include Abba-Mari’s first letter (MQp 1, p. 20 / MQd 19, p., l. 8); the first Barcelona communal letter (MQp 20, p. 61 / MQd 38, p. 413, ll. 58-59); the joint letter by Todros and Abba-Mari to Barcelona (MQp 22, p. 63 / MQd 40, p. 419, l.3); Ibn Adret’s letter to Jacob b. Makhir (MQp 40, p. 87 / MQd 59, p. ll. 43-44); Ibn Adret’s reply to Samuel b. Reuben de Béziers (MQp 42, p. 95 / MQd 61, p. 546, l. 125); the introduction to *Sefer ha-Yare'ah* (MQp SY Intro, p. 123 / MQd 77, p. 644, l. 100); and note Ibn Adret’s citation of a passage in which a witch turns into a scorpion (Sanhedrin 67b) in the halakhic second part of his initial response (MQp 3, p. 25 / MQd 21, p. 291, ll. 124-128).

<sup>114</sup> For further discussion, see Chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>115</sup> The Ramah, a scion of the prominent Abulafia (Abū'l-ʿAfiyah) family of Burgos, was a preeminent figure in Toledo in the first half of the thirteenth century, famed for his Talmud commentary and other works as well as for contesting Maimonides’ ideas on resurrection. For a summary of the events of this early controversy, which chiefly concerned corporeal resurrection as discussed in *Mishneh Torah* and which began during the lifetime of Maimonides, ending shortly after his death, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Yitzhak Baer, *A*

Maimonidean controversy that took place at the turn of the thirteenth century—almost exactly a century before the one Abba-Mari was to set in motion.<sup>116</sup> It is plausible that Abba-Mari knew of the *Kitāb*, although it is not a given; it is not clear what kind of circulation the *Kitāb* enjoyed, and even if it was widely circulated, as Menachem Kellner has demonstrated, it was possible for Occitan scholars of the time to have been unaware of well-regarded texts.<sup>117</sup> In any case, there are obvious affinities between the two works. Most plainly, Abulafia's compilation, like Abba-Mari's, is a careful selection of letters circulated across the Pyrenees concerning the role of philosophy in Jewish culture. More importantly, as already noted, the *Kitāb*, like *Minḥat Qena'ot*, includes headnotes that briefly explain the circumstances surrounding the sending of a letter, meaning that both author-editors recognize that there is an integrity to the letter as an "original" text. Common to both works, too, is an awareness of the value of correspondence and the desire to explain the

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*History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, translated by Louis Schoffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 1:100-101; Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict on the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport: Bayard, 193; reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1970), Chapter 4, "The Agitation of Meir Abulafia of Toledo," 47-65; and Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), Chapter 7, "The Resurrection Debate," 109-135. The Ramah was also involved in the controversy of the 1230s, insofar as his was requested by Nahmanides; however, disillusioned by the events recorded in *Kitāb al-Risā'il*, Abulafia declined to be actively involved. On this, see Baer, 1:106-110.

<sup>116</sup> Published as *Kitāb al-Rasā'il - Sefer Iggerot*, edited by Jehiel Brill (Paris, 1871); nine manuscripts are extant (one consists of extracts only). This collection included several letters from Lunel, which would have been in circulation there and perhaps elsewhere in Occitania some seventy years prior to Abba-Mari's activities; either copies of the letters or the Ramah's compilation could plausibly have been preserved there, and would have been of great interest to Abba-Mari and his compatriots. At least one of the surviving manuscripts of *Kitāb al-Rasā'il*, the Biblioteca Palatina's Ms. Parma 3024, dates to the fourteenth century, although it is written in an Italian hand. The work apparently had a general introduction in Arabic, which was published by David Yellin in *Kiryat Sefer* 6 (1929/30).

<sup>117</sup> See his "Communication or Lack Thereof Among 13th-14th Century Provençal Jewish Philosophers: Moses ibn Tibbon and Gersonides on Song of Songs," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora*, edited by Sophia Menache, 227-255 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), especially the conclusion on p. 246.

context in which letters were written. In addition, the *Kitāb* and *Minḥat Qena'ot* share a literary style (tropes, textual citations, register). It is unsurprising that both works would utilize the same phrases and imagery, considering that they drew from the same textual culture and its scriptural canon. Both men, for instance, studded their prose with references to their “zeal” and with metaphors of warring with words.<sup>118</sup> Nor is it surprising to find both men writing primarily in rhymed belletristic prose, as befitting the educated aristocracy in Occitania as in Iberia.<sup>119</sup>

An important difference between *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* and *Minḥat Qena'ot*, on the other hand, is that Abulafia's *Kitāb* is a far slimmer work both in terms of the materials it collects and in terms of its goals. It compiles fewer letters, involving fewer correspondents, and records events occurring

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<sup>118</sup> See especially the opening to Abulafia's first two letters to Lunel, e.g. םד משכלי היתה עלי ותשאני במראות ן על כנפי רוח קנאות (*Kitāb*, 13). The closing lines of the poem that opens Abulafia's last letter to Lunel contains imagery of the writer as warrior, also in common with the language of *Minḥat Qena'ot* (*Kitāb*, 51).

<sup>119</sup> The two men, separated by a century, are marked by a strain of moderate cultural conservatism characterized by an anxiety over the danger inherent in faulty theological positions, unaccompanied by a distrust of systematic theology per se—a stance which derives from their social class and corresponding education. Predictably, perhaps, each man approached a communal leader and was rebuffed, although he eventually won the support of the community. It is likely that each was inclined to undertake such risky agitation because of their stature: both men were scions of families sufficiently prominent that they were assured a response to their proposals, as well as a measure of protection despite the controversial nature of their activities. Abba-Mari's age in 1306 is unknown, but it appears that, like Abulafia, he was a younger man writing to a well-established authority: in Abba-Mari's case, Ibn Adret; in Abulafia's, Jonathan b. David ha-Kohen de Lunel (c. 1135–after 1210). Jonathan ha-Kohen did not deign to answer Abulafia, leaving the task to his colleague Aaron b. Meshullam (reported by Abulafia in the headnote to the first letter, in which he adds that when Aaron replied in Jonathan's stead, he “responded to me...in anger”: *Kitāb*, 1). However, in the 1230s, Abulafia's complaints were taken so seriously that they resulted in the burning of Maimonides' works, although at that point, discouraged and angered by the response he received some twenty years earlier, the Ramah declined to become involved. In the intervening period, Abulafia became a leading authority, productive author, and a galvanizing force for Castilian Jewry (Baer, 1:78–96; Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, pp. 1–25). Like Abulafia, Abba-Mari was initially brushed off and criticized for his position; similarly, his complaints would soon enough be recognized by Ibn Adret, resulting in the ban proposal that divided the Occitan communities. However, Abba-Mari never attained the position in his own community that Abulafia did in his.

over a shorter span of time. Whereas the *Kitāb* includes only three letters written by Abulafia himself, *Minḥat Qena'ot* includes thirty authored by Abba-Mari.<sup>120</sup> If Abulafia possesses a brand of historical awareness in collecting the letters, it is far less developed. His headnotes are briefer, and he makes no reference to the process of compiling the letters. He is also less careful about differentiating his comments from the texts of the letters himself. For instance, inserted into the middle of his first letter to Lunel is the following comment:

I am presently recording, for your benefit, the motivations behind my first letter which I sent to Lunel and all the sources contained therein, including the precise wording of the letter and all that came about as a result of it...he who has strayed from the straight path...shall hear it and recognize it as the truth.<sup>121</sup>

Abulafia then continues with the text of the letter to Lunel, without clearly indicating where this comment ends. While Abba-Mari does, in several letters, insert comments in the middle of a letter, he differentiates clearly between his comments and the text he is copying, often using a

<sup>120</sup> This count excludes the two later letters of eulogy, for Ibn Adret (d. c. 1310) and Menaḥem ha-Meiri (d. 1316), composed by Abba-Mari, which are sometimes included in printed versions (they are excluded from the Pressburg edition and included by Dimitrovsky, as MQd \*126, pp. 875-883). Ibn Adret's date of death is given as 1310 by Abraham Zacuto (1452–c. 1515) in *Sefer ha-Yuḥasin* (in Part 5; p. 223 in *Sefer Yuḥasin ha-Shalem*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by Herschell Filipowski [Jerusalem, 1963]); ha-Meiri's is apparently known from contemporary reports, including Abba-Mari's eulogy, which references Sancho I of Majorca (r. 1311-1324)'s confiscation and taxation of Hebrew books in 1315 (MQd \*127, p. 881, ll. 84-85, and see also the later editorial headnote by an unknown author, p. 875, ll. 4-6). It should be mentioned that the lengthiest of Abba-Mari's letters is not as long as any of Abulafia's three letters.

<sup>121</sup> *Kitāb al-Rasā'il*, 8-9. Cf. p. 16, where it is unclear whether Abulafia is addressing his present reader or the Lunel *nikhbadim* when he writes, "And here is a sampling of straws I've gathered from his sheaves" ("וזהנה לכם מעט מן הקש אשר קששתי בעמריו [של הרמב"ם]). Hayyim Brody reads this as an integral part of the text of the letter; see his "קינת רמ"ה על הרמב"ם" in ספר הרמב"ם של תרביץ: למלאת שמונה מאות שנה ליום הולדתו, 1-9 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1935), 2.



signal phrase such as “and here is a copy of the letter.”<sup>122</sup> From this, it can be said that Abba-Mari’s editorship is more conscious of the textual integrity of the letters he was copying in comparison to Abulafia. The practical need for polemicizing against incorrect views, such as the spiritualization of resurrection, is more prevalent than the record-keeping function of anthologizing the letters.<sup>123</sup>

#### A POLEMICAL MANUAL: THE PURPOSE OF *MINḤAT QENA'OT*

According to Abba-Mari, the chief impetus for assembling his book was simply to respond to the transgressive views that were widely tolerated in his society, thereby stemming the tide of foreign influence on Jewish thought and preserving the study of Torah. A typical statement from the theological introduction about the ostensible purpose of *Minḥat Qena'ot* is to ensure “that [Jews] shall see the wondrous in God’s Torah and thus merit to be like the angel of the Lord of Multitudes.”<sup>124</sup> Whether or not this was indeed Abba-Mari’s purpose in compiling *Minḥat Qena'ot* is a question beyond the historian’s purview; but plainly Abba-Mari wished to present his book’s purpose as piously protective of what he considered to be normative Judaism.

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<sup>122</sup> It may be of some significance that such “medial notes” occur with greater frequency in the later letters, perhaps reflecting the exigencies of the expulsion under which Abba-Mari was laboring to compile *Minḥat Qena'ot*.

<sup>123</sup> Another, more general difference between *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* and *Minḥat Qena'ot* lies in the method of argument used by the two authors in their own letters. While both utilize the halakhic process to frame their concerns about rationalism, where Abulafia is concerned with establishing correct belief through the halakhic process itself, Abba-Mari by and large prefers to act by arguing for restricted access to texts that profess illegitimate ideas.

<sup>124</sup> “כדי שיראו [השרידים] בתורת הש' נפלאות ויזכו להיות כמלאך ה' צבאות” MQp Introduction, p. 4 / MQd Intro., p. 229, ll. 66-67.

In creating a polemical manual against ideational transgression, Abba-Mari was also responding to Ibn Adret's pragmatic request that he copy all the letters in his possession, creating a record of the correspondence for Ibn Adret's use (a task Abba-Mari did not complete until after the French expulsion, as discussed below).<sup>125</sup> Ibn Adret tells Abba-Mari that he wishes to have copies of the letters so that "I can compile them in order to show the communities where we stand."<sup>126</sup> This statement demonstrates the agency that writing had in effecting change in communal regulation: Ibn Adret evidently felt that reading over the letters would convince other Iberian communities of his region to support the institution of a ban against the underage study of philosophy. His request also demonstrates the practical need to reference key events in the controversy. Ram Ben-Shalom points to the use of letters as tools of propaganda and social coercion: "The compilation of the letters and their publication enabled the refutation of rumors when necessary...the compendium of letters could constitute conclusive evidence against...malicious rumors."<sup>127</sup> Ben-Shalom notes that Ibn Adret re-sent to Abba-Mari an apologetic letter he had received from a Montpellier *nikbbad* who had initially sided with the rationalists: "Ben Adret understood that Abba Mari would be able to use the letter of remorse as effective propaganda, and therefore hastened to forward it to him."<sup>128</sup> Insofar as *Minḥat Qena'ot* fulfills Ibn Adret's request

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<sup>125</sup> Ibn Adret's request is in MQp 66, p. 138 / MQd 85, p. 687, ll. 31-34.

<sup>126</sup> MQp 66, p. 138 / MQd 85, p. 687, ll. 33-34.

<sup>127</sup> Ben-Shalom, "Communication and Propaganda," 183.

<sup>128</sup> Ben-Shalom, "Communication and Propaganda," 184. The letter in which the apology is included is MQp 104-105 / MQd 68, pp. 575-579. The *nikbbad* is not named, but it is unclear whether Ibn Adret and/or Abba-Mari intentionally omitted his name, whether Abba-Mari had forgotten it by the time he copied this letter into *Minḥat Qena'ot* (as he forgot other fact, such as the circumstances and authorship of MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, pp. 358-359), or whether Abba-Mari never knew the identity of this *nikbbad*.



for a copy of the letter exchange, the motive for its composition is largely polemical. The resulting collection could serve as a manual for furthering the aims of the ban proponents who opposed the popularization of rationalist ideas, as well as vindicating their views as correct, prudent, and worthy of adoption.<sup>129</sup> Such polemical letter exchanges are notably common in the period following the French expulsion.<sup>130</sup>

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Presumably the propaganda power of the letter rested on the ability of the community to identify the apologist as a real person.

<sup>129</sup> See also Abba-Mari's statement, "I, Abba-Mari b. Moses b. Joseph ha-Yarḥi compiled these letters and brought them as gifts before the students, so that they may yield fruit for generations to come," MQp Introduction, p. 4 / MQd Introduction, p. 228, ll. 51-52.

<sup>130</sup> They include the early-fourteenth century exchange between Isaac Ibn Pollegar and Abner of Burgos, mentioned above, as well as the post-1391 letter exchanges between Joshua ha-Lorqi (Geronimo de Santa Fe, d. c. 1419), Solomon ha-Levi (Pablo de Santa Maria, c. 1350-1435), and Joseph Orabuena (d. after 1399); Profiat Duran (Isaac b. Moses ha-Levi, d. c. 1414) and Davi Bonet Bonjorn (De Barrio, fl. second half of the fourteenth century); Astruc Rimokh (Fransesc de Sant Jordi, fl. late fourteenth-fifteenth century) and Shaltiel Bonafos (fl. late fourteenth-fifteenth century); and Solomon b. Reuben Bonafed (late fourteenth-mid-fifteenth century), Isaac Adret (fl. late fourteenth-fifteenth century), Solomon da Piera fl. late fourteenth-fifteenth century, Joseph b. Lavi (Vidal b. Benvenist, later Gonzalo, de la Cavalleria, d. 1373) and Vidal Benvenist (Abenvenist, fl. late fourteenth-fifteenth century). Regarding the last group mentioned, there has been some confusion between the two Vidal (b.) Benvenists—one whose father, Judah b. Solomon, had the vernacular name Benvenist, and another man in the Saragossa circle of intellectuals named Vidal Benvenist. The former was a member of the celebrated Aragonese de la Cavalleria family, known in Hebrew as the Ibn or Abu Lavi (אבן לביא) family, prominent since the thirteenth century. On the distinction between Vidal b. Benveniste de la Cavalleria and Vidal Benvenist, see Haim Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, edited by Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997); and Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Secular Hebrew Poetry," 301-302, n. 3.

Of these exchanges, Profiat Duran's *'Al Teḥi ka-'Avotekha* in particular has been used by its readers as a stand-alone work. Though dispatched from Perpignan to Meir Alguades (Alguadex), the physician to John I (1213–1276), in Castile for circulation there, it was treated as a treatise worthy of exposition and was to be published with a commentary by Joseph Ibn Shem-Tov in Constantinople in 1554. In modern scholarship, *'Al Teḥi ka-'Avotekha* is often described as a "pamphlet," reflecting the usage of that term to refer to a text intended for widespread circulation, usually propagandistic—and hence the scholarly understanding of this letter as a independent text meant for public distribution.

It must be remembered that Abba-Mari composed *Minḥat Qena'ot* after the political dismantling of Jewish Occitania, when his community was struggling to regroup and the importance of banning the underage study of philosophy was competing with much more basic matters of communal survival. Despite this, he believed that dangerous ideas remained in need of address, and that the discussion of such ideas merited preservation, in hopes, it seems, of effecting change regardless of the new political realities. Abba-Mari had long since been castigated by Ibn Adret for failing to copy the letters from the controversy, and the moment for their use would seem to have passed.<sup>131</sup> Even before the expulsion, Ibn Adret seems to have given up on Abba-Mari and directed his own student, Sasson b. Meir, to compile the letters.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, Abba-Mari's keenest supporters from the old Occitan communities (Narbonne, Lunel, Capestang) were the ones perhaps most affected by the 1306 expulsion, since these cities lay squarely within French territory. If ever there was a time to drop the project—as Abba-Mari had claimed to do during the last lull in correspondence, over the winter months of 1304-1305—it was now.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, at this moment, in 1307, in exile, Abba-Mari pressed on.<sup>134</sup> He reported that Toledo was supportive of

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<sup>131</sup> MQp 79, p. 152 / MQd 98, p. 722, ll. 31-34. The initial request for copies of the letters is made by Ibn Adret in MQp 66, p. 138 / MQd 85, p. 687, ll. 31-34. For more on this, see above and Chapter 1.

<sup>132</sup> MQp 67, p. 138 / MQd 86, p. 688, ll. 5-8. There is some confusion in the manuscripts over this student's name, which appears alternately as Sasson and Samson; a play on the word Sasson appears in Abba-Mari's response to the student, MQp 69, p. 140 / MQd 88, p. 694, ll. 4-5, which may indicate the Sasson is correct.

<sup>133</sup> For the dating of the events described in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, see Chapter 1. Abba-Mari's statement about giving up the campaign for a ban is in MQp 60, p. 131 / MQd 79, p. 665, l. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Actually, it is impossible to know whether Abba-Mari and his fellow correspondents preferred to write themselves or dictate to a student or scribe; there is evidence of both practices. See Colette Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, edited and translated by Nicholas de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 204-207.

instituting the ban among the scattered Occitans; he pledged to compile a companion volume recording the letters written by the rationalist faction.<sup>135</sup> The circumstances under which he did so point strongly to the pragmatic efficacy Abba-Mari attributed to the letters discussing the necessity of restricting the study of philosophy, in addition to their ideological significance.

#### THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF IDEAS

As well as polemical and pietistic motives, there are indications that Abba-Mari compiled *Minḥat Qena'ot* out of a nascent awareness of the historical value of preserving the documents of the controversy.<sup>136</sup> That he did so could only be a side effect of the greater, and more characteristically medieval, task of polemicizing against one's detractors; after all, the surviving corpus of medieval Jewish writings is a literature characterized by "comparatively little interest in recording the ongoing historical experience of the Jews," as Yosef Yerushalmi has persuasively argued.<sup>137</sup> And yet, the prerogative of shaping the text more forcefully was at Abba-Mari's fingertips, and we do not see him availing himself of this immense power.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> MQp 97, pp. 176-177 / MQd 117, p. 824, ll. 1-5.

<sup>136</sup> Abba-Mari's younger contemporary, Joseph Ibn Kaspi, would discuss the authority of an "original text" in the first essay of his exegetical-philosophical treatise *Shulḥan Kasef*, as noted by Ram Ben-Shalom in "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 63, n. 229. In Hannah Kasher's edition of *Shulḥan Kasef* (Jerusalem, 1996), the passage is on pp. 58-60, with relevant discussion continuing in the next section, pp. 60-100. However, Ibn Kaspi was drawing a distinction between a Hebrew text—the "original"—and its Latin translation—the "copy"—as opposed to a text and its copy written in the same language and intended to be identical. His sensitivity to issues of transmission establishes an awareness of the issue among a near-contemporary of Abba-Mari's, though not in a way directly relevant to Abba-Mari's anthologizing activity.

<sup>137</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 31; and see also his "Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth

Abba-Mari edits with respect to the integrity of the events represented in the letters, despite the fact that he espoused the doctrine of a causal relationship between human transgression and divine retribution. He expresses this belief in two places in particular. First, he reports in a headnote that Samuel ha-Sulami turned Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim out of his home after the death of Samuel's daughter as though there is a causal link: namely, because ha-Sulami harbored the heretic Levi, his daughter died. Abba-Mari also understands ha-Sulami's action as expressing an acceptance of his guilt in not initially heeding Ibn Adret, who counseled him to evict Levi.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, in reporting his experience with the 1306 expulsion, Abba-Mari suggests sin as a generic explanation for this event.<sup>140</sup> However, Abba-Mari does not draw such conclusions broadly: he does

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Century," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 46-47, Jubilee Volume (1928/29-1978/79) [Part 2] (1979-1980): 619.

<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, the same type of restraint is evident among contemporaneous Christian intellectuals. In his study of medieval Latin translations of the Qur'ān, Thomas E. Burman examines the extra-textual features of the translations and their manuscripts, such as marginalia, study aids, commentaries, and philological tools, and finds evidence of non-polemical reading strategies alongside the polemical motives for approaching this text. "We...find a complexity of attitudes towards the Qur'ān and of ways of experiencing it as a text and object," Burman writes. "As far as I can tell, all the Qur'ān readers on which this book focuses considered it to be a false antiscripture. Yet there is plenty of evidence that they were nevertheless capable of viewing it and experiencing in quite other ways at the same time" (*Reading the Qur'ān in Latin 1140-1560* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 7). A prominent example is the literary register of the *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*, a paraphrastic translation completed c. 1142 in Iberia by Robert of Ketton (Chester) under the behest of Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, and the most-read and commented-upon translation of the Qur'ān in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. The literary style chosen by Robert follows the rhetoric recommended by scholastic manuals for the writing of important cultural documents, Burman points out. Implicit in this choice is the message that the Qur'ān, while a false scripture of Christianity's adversaries, is nonetheless granted the literary respect reserved for valuable texts. The nascent sense of disinterested scholarship seems to be present in *Minḥat Qena'ot* in the same way that it emerges in the Latin Qur'ān translations. Also like them, the matrix of objectivity in *Minḥat Qena'ot* is not the contents of the texts themselves but what surrounds them: the headnotes, literary style, and other extra-textual elements.

<sup>139</sup> MQp 17, p. 55 / MQd 35, p. 395, ll. 1-3.

<sup>140</sup> MQp 100, p. 179 / MQd 120(a), pp. 835, ll. 1-2.

not, in fact, structure *Minḥat Qena'ot* as a cautionary tale of communal transgression leading to divine judgment (a theme transparently hinted at by the title of the work, as discussed above).<sup>141</sup> He does not blame, as he might be expected to do, his opponents for the destruction of the Montpellier community; he does not even mention its destruction until the chronological place in the narrative, namely, its end. Instead, he presents the letters as though the ideas they bear matter in and of themselves. Abba-Mari seems impervious to the larger mission of decoding “the meaning of Jewish history,” which, Yerushalmi has argued, constitutes the dominant mode of historical understanding in medieval texts.<sup>142</sup> Along with his polemical interest in proving that the traditionalist ban is the correct course of action, Abba-Mari appears interested in preserving the facts of the exchange regarding the controversy.<sup>143</sup>

It appears that Abba-Mari intended *Minḥat Qena'ot* as a record of the ban proponents' letters that, by its accuracy, would serve to aid those who would continue the struggle against

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<sup>141</sup> Susan Einbinder has argued that Occitan rationalists—she cites Yedayah ha-Penini, Joseph b. Sheshet Ibn Latimi (fl. c. 1300), and Crescas Caslari (Crescas du Caylar, Israel b. Joseph ha-Levi Caslari, fl. first half of the fourteenth century) as exemplars—“were less inclined to see the world around them as God’s stage for collective punishment or redemption”; see her *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>142</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 31. That is, Abba-Mari does not seem to have a typological understanding of historical events, in the way that, for example, the crusade chroniclers did. On these, see, *inter alia*, Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Jeremy Cohen, “The ‘Persecutions of 1096’: From Martyrdom to Martyrology: The Sociocultural Context of the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles” [Hebrew], *Zion* 59, no. 3 (1994): 169–208 and *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Ivan G. Marcus, “From Politics to Martyrdom: Shifting Paradigms in the Hebrew Narratives of the 1096 Crusade Riots,” *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 40–52.

<sup>143</sup> This paradoxical message—that divine retribution is imminent but irrelevant to the outcome of the controversy—exposes a bifurcated worldview that reflects Abba-Mari’s moderate views on rationalism.

transgressive allegoresis.<sup>144</sup> To achieve this goal, he had to take care in preserving documentary evidence, which, as detailed above, he achieved through careful separation of the letter-texts from his editorial hand. His recognition of the boundaries of an historical document is especially evident in those places in *Minḥat Qena'ot* where he does not copy a letter in its entirety.<sup>145</sup> In one case, Abba-Mari cites extracts from a letter he had written at the time that the Montpellier ban opponents were circulating their counter-ban. Even here, where Abba-Mari is the author of both the source-text and the notes surrounding it, he is aware of the integrity of the source as a unit composed earlier in time. He first introduces his letter, which he dispatched to Barcelona to report on the goings-on in Montpellier, by explaining the circumstances of its writing.<sup>146</sup> After the explanation, he writes, “And here is a copy of the letter which I sent to the Rabbi [Ibn Adret],” and includes several lines from the letter, in rhymed prose.<sup>147</sup> Abba-Mari then breaks into straight prose and returns to reporting on the contents of the letter, referring to Ibn Adret in the third-person once again.<sup>148</sup> Although he does not use a signal phrase at the end of his citation, the transition from citing the letter to editorial remark is relatively clear due to the lack of rhyme and

<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Abba-Mari's prescient preservation of documentary evidence in an ordered framework is what preserved these letters. As noted in the Introduction, few of the letters preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* were concurrently preserved through other channels, the two most prominent being Yedayah ha-Penini Bedarshi's *Ketav ha-Hitnazzlut* and Samuel b. Joseph's *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*.

<sup>145</sup> This relates to the comparison of Abba-Mari's work with Meir Abulafia's *Kitāb al-Rasā'il* above, in which Abba-Mari is far more clear about the separation of his (chronologically later) editorial comments from the letter-text.

<sup>146</sup> MQp 73, p. 142 / MQd 92, pp. 701-702, ll. 1-25.

<sup>147</sup> “וזה טופס הכתב ששלחתי אל הרב י”ץ,” MQp 73, pp. 142-143 / MQd 92, p. 702, ll. 24-25. The text of the original letter is cited in ll. 25-28.

<sup>148</sup> E.g., “סוף דבר, ספרתי לו כל המאורע וחליתי פנים שישלח לנו פסק דין האדרבה, חתום,” MQp 73, p. 143 / MQd 92, p. 703, ll. 32-33. Abba-Mari's citation of the letter ends on l. 28.

lower register, as well as the content. In another section, Abba-Mari is even more mindful of noting where his citation begins and ends. He first states the he has decided to copy only extracts from the “lengthy and dignified” letter written by Samuel ha-Sulami.<sup>149</sup> After completing his remarks in the headnote, he begins to copy Samuel’s letter, indicating, “And this is a copy of some of the words.”<sup>150</sup> Following a sizable extract, Abba-Mari breaks off his copying and writes, “Also found written in the middle of that letter is the following passage,” after which he copies more from Samuel’s letter.<sup>151</sup> At the end of the section, Abba-Mari closes by noting, “Up to here is a small selection of what was written in the letter of the scholar Samuel ha-Sulami, may his memory merit life in the world-to-come.”<sup>152</sup> To alter the original letters, or to insert their text into his present writing without indicating the texts’ boundaries, would contravene Abba-Mari’s purpose. A similar awareness of the integrity of the base-text is evident in Abba-Mari’s preservation of the letters’ formalistic *ḥatimot*, which often duplicate information communicated in the headnote.<sup>153</sup> In

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<sup>149</sup> MQp 97, p. 176 / MQd 117, p. 824, l. 1.

<sup>150</sup> MQp 97, p. 177 / MQd 117, p. 835, l. 10.

<sup>151</sup> MQp 97, p. 177 / MQd 117, p. 829, l. 51.

<sup>152</sup> MQp 97, p. 177 / MQd 117, p. 830, ll. 58-59. This also indicates that Abba-Mari wrote this section after ha-Sulami’s death.

<sup>153</sup> Here the medieval editor states that these *ḥatimot* are written on the exterior text of letters: “he wrote on the back of the letter,” “I wrote upon the letter,” “upon the letter” (Targarona Borrás and Scheindlin, ed., “Literary Correspondence,” 76-113). Targarona Borrás and Scheindlin call the *ḥatimah* section “‘outside the writing’ or ‘at the back of the letter’” and observe that it is usually composed of two subsections, a poem typically exhorting the verses to hurry towards their recipient and a dedication in rhymed prose stating the recipient and praising him (“Literary Correspondence,” 71). Where other medieval letters collections preserve *ḥatimot*, that seems to be because the *ḥatimot* included verse poetry, as in the *dīwān* assembled by Solomon b. Meshullam de Piera, which preserves literary correspondence between Solomon and various intellectuals.

these types of editorial decisions, there is a sense of the historical and an appreciation of documentary evidence.

Abba-Mari's emergent historical consciousness grew from his implicit belief in the power of the information he created by assembling the documents of the controversy. If the ideas and events of the controversy had not possessed potency in his view, surely Abba-Mari would not have been so careful in preserving them. His care demonstrates his faith that the integrity of these ideas and events was crucial to their power. Rather than shaping the events through use of the editorial hand, Abba-Mari offers a corrective to his opponents' views in his three creedal principles, presented in the introductory treatise (and in a limited way also in *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*), where he provides his own suggestions about the proper understanding of contentious points of theology. In the headnotes that Abba-Mari includes, we see not propagandistic statements but explanatory text that, intentionally or not, provides historical context for the letters Abba-Mari is ordering and preserving. Moreover, in his statement, insincere though it may be, that he intends to collect the letters of his opponents, Abba-Mari evinces an awareness of what would develop, far in the future, into two fundamental principles of historiography: the value of keeping records regardless of their truth value, and the interpretive significance of presenting information.



### CHAPTER 3 | THE POLARIZATION OF MAIMONIDEAN MODERATES

Among the élites of Occitania, opinion was divided about the role human reason ought to play in Jewish life, although a consensus emerged that rationalist philosophy, while outside the tradition, had valuable and legitimate things to say about the physical universe, human experience, and even the rabbinic heritage. This consensus was reflected in widespread interest in philosophy, expressed in *Minḥat Qena'ot* by reports of attendance at allegorizing sermons and popular use of medical remedies rooted in Galenic medicine and Ptolemaic astronomy. While there were absolutists among the participants in the controversy—those who thought rationalism should play no role in Judaism and those who, conversely, argued that philosophy was entirely compatible with Judaism—the majority appear to have been moderates who appreciated the relative value of rationalist philosophy of Greek origin. Though they agreed that philosophy was external to Jewish tradition, they accepted its inclusion in the educational program and intellectual discourse of the aristocratic class. Some moderates, including Abba-Mari, were nevertheless wary of philosophy's propensity to mislead the susceptible, including young men who were not sufficiently grounded in Talmudic studies and lesser-educated laymen whose access to rationalism was public and diffuse.

This disagreement among moderates concerns the public role of philosophy, rather than the value of philosophy itself, on which moderates were agreed. With the introduction of ban proposals threatening with excommunication those who studied philosophy before attaining a given age (or those who taught philosophy to an underaged person), moderates were polarized into two oppositional camps. Because of the existence of a broad consensus prior to the introduction of the ban proposal, the seemingly discrete and diametrically opposed groups effectively created by the

ban proposal encompassed a wide spectrum of opinion. The strident lobbying of the groups' spokesmen for or against the ban did not represent the varied and often moderate views held by their members. The actual terms of the ban, which permitted the study of philosophy under controlled conditions, suggest that philosophy was accepted by a critical mass of the élite as a legitimate source of study for Jews if grounded in Talmudic training, even as it remained external to the Jewish tradition in their view.

At the turn of the fourteenth century, a recommendation for curricular focus on rabbinic texts and exegetical methods was no longer primarily an outgrowth of internal developments within the academic culture of centers of study, but more a deliberate counter-reaction to the Greco-Islamic knowledge flooding the intellectual landscape. Of the generations following the collapse of Muslim al-Andalus and the adaptation of its culture to the new socio-political conditions of the western Mediterranean, Adena Tanenbaum has written,

There is nothing particularly heterodox about their critiques: all were insiders to rabbinic culture who acknowledged the authority of Scripture and rabbinic law. But their cosmopolitanism led to dissatisfaction with religious leaders, scholars, and community members whose prayer and study struck them as graceless, pretentious, insincere, insular, or parochial.<sup>1</sup>

In turn, cosmopolitanism gained cultural hegemony, and the defense of the culture it regarded as graceless, insincere, and parochial counter-cultural. Insisting upon the exclusivity of rabbinic modes of thought as against other available ways of reading scripture and understanding the world was

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<sup>1</sup> Adena Tanenbaum, "Arrogance, Bad Form, and Curricular Narrowness: Belletristic Critiques of Rabbinic Culture from Medieval Spain and Provence," in *Rabbinic Culture and its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, edited by Matt Goldish and Daniel Frank, 57-82 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 74.

therefore a reaction to change. Whereas adherence to a rabbinic worldview in Occitania was formerly traditional, in the sense expressed by the Hebrew terms *qabbalah* and *masorah*, it was now traditionalist, in the sense of privileging internally transmitted knowledge, and way of knowing, over other competing systems.<sup>2</sup>

Strictly speaking, *all* the voices that emerge in *Minḥat Qena'ot* are traditionalist, creating a wide spectrum of “traditionalism,” since even the most enthusiastic champions of the worth of philosophy did not reject this claim of privilege.<sup>3</sup> However, a real distinction separates the more traditionalist in the debate from the less traditionalist, and that is the relative value each placed on knowledge derived by human reason.<sup>4</sup> The “rationalists” considered human reason to be of great value and self-evident authority, though not possessing the value or authority of divine revelation. More conservative thinkers maintained that the value of philosophy was moderate to negligible, and should certainly be put off in favor of rabbinic study; some saw it as possessing no value or

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<sup>2</sup> As just one example, Abba-Mari refers to the declining primacy of the Talmud by the locution “ספרי” “הקבלה באבדן” in his first letter to Ibn Adret: MQp 1, p. 20 / MQd 19, p. 273, l. 44.

<sup>3</sup> It is also true that certain *philosophical* propositions were also generically accepted by all parties to the debate, such as metaphorical understanding of anthropomorphic language in Genesis or nonliteral readings of certain pericopes in Bereshit Rabbah.

<sup>4</sup> Especially as presented by Ibn Rushd’s Aristotle, which was integrated into post-Andalusi Mediterranean Jewish culture via a large-scale Hebrew translation movement; see Steven Harvey, “Arabic into Hebrew: The Hebrew Translation Movement and the Influence of Averroes Upon Medieval Jewish Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 258-80 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); ); Oliver Leaman, “Jewish Averroism,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 769-82 (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Alfred L. Ivry, “Philosophical Translations from the Arabic into Hebrew during the Middle Ages,” in *Rencontres de Cultures dans la Philosophie Médiévale: Traductions et traducteurs de l’antiquité tardive au XIVe siècle*, edited by J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (Louvain-la-Neuve/Cassino, 1990).

even as possessing negative value—as being potentially damaging.<sup>5</sup> It is in this relative sense that some writers of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters might be termed traditionalist in contradistinction to those who wrote, or are cited and described, in support of a curriculum with philosophy at its center. However, broadly applied this is a reductionist characterization of the wide spectrum of viewpoints expressed by the aristocrats included in the controversy, and in particular mischaracterizes ban proponents (“traditionalists”) as seeking continuity rather than change.

#### THE POPULARIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY

The aforementioned popular interest in the rationalist approach to understanding the world had swelled as Greco-Islamic philosophy was introduced into the non-Arabic-speaking Jewish communities over the course of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, normalizing it as a subject of intellectual discourse. This interest expressed itself in several ways, according to the evidence in *Minḥat Qena'ot*: in attendance at public homilies offering allegorical readings of scripture, in the hiring of philosophically-educated tutors, and in the consultation of medical practitioners, who were by and large trained in Galen and Ibn Sīnā, and use of astrological remedies.<sup>6</sup> The *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters occasionally reveal glimpses of the enthusiasm with which

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the case of Naḥmanides (Ibn Adret's teacher), on which see Y. Tzvi Langermann, “Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude towards Science,” *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 223–45.

<sup>6</sup> On the medical professional at this time, of which Jews were a part, see: Michael R. McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 62–63; Vivian Nutton, “Medicine in Medieval Western Europe, 1000–1500,” in *The Western Medical Tradition, 800 BC to AD 1800*, 139–206 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139–145; Luis García Ballester, “A Marginal Learned Medical World: Jewish, Muslim and Christian Medical Practitioners, and the Use of Arabic Medical Sources in Late Medieval Spain,” in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, edited by *idem*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press,

rationalist knowledge was received in Occitania.<sup>7</sup> This is implied by Abba-Mari to Ibn Adret early in the controversy: “The reason that I was aroused and the spirit of zeal began to dog me is that, when I saw that a few people from other places would preach on the occasion of weddings, in front of young children, and before a crowd at the synagogue.”<sup>8</sup> In Barcelona, too, those interested in philosophy were accused of preaching publicly:

They [ban opponents] have falsified the true Torah, one “razing the castle”<sup>9</sup> and another contradicting [it], neutralizing it all as with vinegar on baking soda.<sup>10</sup> They feel no shame

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1994) and “The New Galen: A Challenge to Latin Galenism in Thirteenth-Century Montpellier,” in *Text and Tradition: Studies in Ancient Medicine and Its Transmission: Presented to Jutta Kollesch*, edited by Klaus-Dietrich Fischer, Diethard Nickel and Paul Potter (Leiden: Brill, 1998; reprint, in idem., *Galen and Galenism* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate/Variorum, 2002); and Y. Tzvi Langermann, *Avicenna and his Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009). On the training of Jewish physicians and their relationships to the Christian medical establishment, see: Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and “Livres médicaux et éducation médicale à propos d’un contrat de Marseille en 1316,” *Mediaeval Studies* 42 (1980): 463-470; Yom Tov Assis, “Jewish Physicians and Medicine in Medieval Spain,” in *Medical Ethics in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, edited by S. S. Kottick and Luis García-Ballester, 33-49 (Jerusalem, 1996); Carmen Caballero-Navas, “Medicine Among Medieval Jews: The Science, the Art, and the Practice,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, edited by Gad Freudenthal, 320-342 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and A. Courtemanche, “Abulcasis, Avicenne et Galien, le savoir d’un médecin juif au miroir d’une expertise médico-légale de la fin du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 19, no. 2 (2002): 441-53. Medicine at this time, despite its foundation in Greco-Islamic sources, was generally regarded as separate from natural philosophy and rationalism in general, and, perhaps because of its purpose and utility, was less controversial. Note that Galenic medicine was neither astrological nor talismanic in the sense criticized by Abba-Mari, his criticisms instead being targeted towards a more popular application of contemporary medicine. I am indebted to Dr. Joel Kaye for this observation. See also Dov Schwartz, “Astral Magic and Specific Properties (*Segullot*) in Medieval Jewish Thought: Non-Aristotelian Science and Theology,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, 301-319.

<sup>7</sup> That is, beyond the more general complaints and references to such sermons, such as Abba-Mari’s description of youths in the thrall of philosophy presented in synagogue sermons, MQp 5, p. 32 / MQd 32, p. 317, ll. 65-76.

<sup>8</sup> MQp 5, p. 31 / MQd 23, p. 316, ll. 64-66.

<sup>9</sup> Based upon Ta’anit 16a, “מריש גזל ומריש כולה ובניהו כל הבירה מקעקע כל הבירה כולה ומחזיר מריש לבעליו,” which advocates tearing down as important a building as a castle if so much as one beam used to build it was stolen. Here, the meaning seems to be “openly and aggressively,” in contradistinction to “neutralizing it all as with vinegar on baking soda.” Perhaps the implication is that some rationalists end up razing the entire Torah because they perceive one interpretation to be in error.

whether in their taverns or their synagogues, always interpreting false *haggadot*. They also belittle the words of sages as though they were of the peasantry, and writing evil writings in their books; they fill their bellies with empty vessels.<sup>11</sup>

Crescas Vidal reports witnessing the popular rationalist sermons which caused consternation to the conservatively-minded, although he finds them unobjectionable:

Although two or three times I've heard the sermons preached by the philosophizers in the synagogue while I was there, nothing that they emitted from their mouths was wrongful or blameworthy. I can't determine whether they restrained themselves in front of me and they are actually of a different mindset, or if their mouths are in harmony with their minds.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the information conveyed here, it is noteworthy that Crescas refers to such sermons as though they are regular occurrences in Perpignan synagogues. In Montpellier, it appears that there was a time during Shabbatot devoted to public homilies, since this time was co-opted on one occasion by the rationalists to explicitly promote their viewpoint.<sup>13</sup> Abba-Mari testifies that Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, a book of philosophical homilies, was read aloud to an assembled group in Montpellier—though perhaps in a manner different than Anatoli intended:

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase "חֲמֶץ עַל-נָתָר" from Proverbs 25:20 is more accurately translated as "like vinegar on natron," natron being a naturally-occurring substance akin to contemporary baking soda (it includes sodium bicarbonate) which reacts with vinegar in visibly similar way. The parallel to this image in Proverbs is one who undresses on a cold day or attempts to cheer up someone who is grieving by singing jingles, and has been interpreted with relatively great variance: see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Vol. 18, Part 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 786. Ha-Me'iri suggests that the phrase refers to weakened potency, since the stain-removing properties of either vinegar or natron are neutralized by mixing the two together: see his *Commentary on Proverbs* to this verse.

<sup>11</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 152-153 / MQd 101, pp. 734, ll. 24-27.

<sup>12</sup> MQd 12, p. 48 / MQd 30, pp. 370-371, ll. 84-87.

<sup>13</sup> This is similar to the public meeting time during which letters were read on Shabbat afternoons in the synagogue, discussed in Chapter 2.

He [Shelemiah de Lunel]<sup>14</sup> assembled several of the community leaders against me, relatives of the scholar Rabbi Jacob [Anatoli], author of the *Malmad*, and told them in no uncertain terms that your [Ibn Adret's] intention with regard to the elderly king are contra "the Malmad" [Anatoli].<sup>15</sup> He [Shelemiah] twisted the matter entirely, so that the relatives [of Anatoli, a Tibbonide] gathered together, along with many others from the community, on the Shabbat of Parashat Parah, and, before Minḥah in the synagogue, they read aloud from the book of "the Malmad"—and stated they would do so each and every Shabbat!<sup>16</sup>

The homilies of *Malmad ha-Talmidim* are in this instance being read aloud as a form of assertion of rationalist propriety and ideals, as well as in protest against anti-rationalist propaganda—not, as Anatoli apparently intended, for the edification of educated layman curious about philosophy.<sup>17</sup> It is unsurprising that the rationalists selected, for this political purpose, a book recording precisely those popular sermons that concerned Abba-Mari and his supporters. Ostensibly they were doing so before an assembled crowd, for the power of the act lay in its public nature. The precise timing of the opponents' protest, which Abba-Mari pointedly notes, indicates that they expected to get the public's attention on a Shabbat afternoon as people gathered for evening prayers. The sermons given at this time were evidently accessible to the public.

<sup>14</sup> The antecedent of the subject is "the man to whom you [Ibn Adret] sent your noble letter, which begins 'From when I was a youth until now that I am old'," ll. 31-32; that letter, to which Abba-Mari refers here by incipit, is MQp 30, pp. 75-76 / MQd 49, pp. 461-466, which was sent to Shelemiah de Lunel. This must mean that the subject in this passage is Shelemiah, although Abba-Mari does not refer to him by name.

<sup>15</sup> The "elderly king" refers to Ibn Adret's remarks in a letter to Shelemiah de Lunel, a fragment of which was preserved by Abba-Mari's editing (out of chronological order) in MQp 9, p. 44 / MQd 27, pp. 358-359. In that letter, Ibn Adret describes the leader of the Montpellier rationalists as the elderly king of Ecclesiastes 4:13, a figure traditionally understood as representing the *yezer ha-ra'* (e.g., in Qohelet Rabbah), who in Ibn Adret's idiom leads the rationalists into despair (described in the language of chapter 10 of Job). On the textual history of this fragmentary letter, see Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> MQp 68, p. 139 / MQd 87, p. 692, ll.37-42.

<sup>17</sup> Even considering that the relationship between written sermons and the homilies delivered verbally is highly problematic, here is an instance in which preserved rationalist sermons were enacted before a crowd. On the difficulties of assessing the relation of homiletic texts to spoken homilies, see Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching, 1200-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5-15.



Another indication of public interest in “external wisdom” is the demand for medical books both in the Greco-Islamic tradition and in derivative versions, which Abba-Mari remarks upon in his opening letter to Ibn Adret.<sup>18</sup> There Abba-Mari describes a book of medical talismans which he implies is in widespread use and which, he suggests, belongs to a class of books that is egregious in recommending idolatrous practices.<sup>19</sup> Here Abba-Mari goes into some detail about the usage of the talismans which he views as transgressive:

If it is our intention to permit this Sign (*zurah*) [of the Lion], then we should permit all other Signs, since just as this Sign is made especially for use with Aries to heal those with kidney disease, there are special Signs made for each of the twelve zodiac signs for the healing of each of the twelve major organs. But if we permit all of these Signs, then no one will seek God, preferring physicians. I heard from one scholar that there is a special book concerning these matters, which divides the sphere into forty-eight signs, consisting of the twelve zodiac signs, the twenty-one southern signs, and the fifteen northern signs.<sup>20</sup> By means of these signs, all acts of sorcery are undertaken. From these, a Sign is selected and drawn upon a special paper in a particular color, which is bound to his [the patient's] clothes and perfumed with special incense or myrrh or wax. There is no doubt that this is idolatry (*avodah zarah*), and blessed is he who removes himself from such people. If it is your judgment to permit the small Sign that is in this book, permit all of them, since all kinds belong to the same class, and all are forms of effigy (*'ov*).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that medical books, even those emerging from the same Greco-Islamic milieu as rationalist philosophy, belong to a fundamentally different class of literature in that they have practical applications. This area of applied medicine is also one on which halakhah is much clearer than it is on theological matters.

<sup>19</sup> There was, in addition, an admixture of folk medicine in the cures that concern Abba-Mari and in medieval medicine in general; see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 57–68 and McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 162–165. The Sign of the Lion is further discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> This division is Ptolemaic: it is described, likely based on the observations of Hipparchus and other ancient predecessors, in Books 7–8 of the *Almagest*. “The sphere” (הגלגל) to which Abba-Mari refers here may be the “ninth sphere” discussed by Maimonides in the section of *Sefer ha-Madda* which describes the spheres, *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah* 3, especially *halakhot* 6–7. He may also have been influenced by Abraham ibn Ezra’s 1148 astrological textbook, *Reshit Hokhmah*; for a description of its contents, see Shlomo Sela, *Abraham ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 58–59. For more on the background of Abba-Mari’s claims, see Dimitrovsky’s n.68 on pp. 274–275, s.v. “הגלגל” and “למ”ח צורות.”

<sup>21</sup> MQp 1, p. 22 / MQd 19, pp. 274–275, ll. 67–72.



In the interest of supporting his argument, Abba-Mari provides some of the most precise details about the usage of medical talismans to be found in *Minḥat Qena'ot*. According to his account, a patient would be given a symbol drawn on a piece of paper, which he attached to his clothing and perfumed with incense. The symbol itself, the color of the drawing, and the type of incense were determined by the stellar configuration that governed the patient's illness. Although Abba-Mari's account must be suspected of ignorance and tendentiousness—it may well be that he is repeating rumors here that have little to do with actual practice—it does represent the type of activity he *believed* to be taking place due to popular demand. At the very least, it indicates that astrological remedies were part of popular consciousness, and manuscript evidence bears this out: medical texts describing such cures were produced in the period at the university at Montpellier, which boasted a flourishing medical faculty c. 1300.<sup>22</sup> The details alarmingly described by Abba-Mari appear to correspond to actual use of medical talismans, in itself an indication of the importance of medical technologies in his society.

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the 'Book of Figures': Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 7/8 (1982): 383–407; Samuel Kottek, "Le Symbole du lion dans la médecine de l'antiquité et du moyen âge," *Revue d'histoire de la médecine hébraïque* 20 (1967): 161–68; and Sarah L. Tilevitz, "Jews, Christians and Lion Pendants: Philosophical and Theological Aspects of Folk Cures as Reflected in Medieval Christian and Jewish Sources," D.H.L. Thesis, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993. On the medical faculty at Montpellier, see Harry Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* (Baltimore, 1944), 241–252; Vern L. Bullough, "The Development of the Medical University at Montpellier to the End of the Fourteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 30 (1956): 508–23; Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 60–77; Andrew Cunningham, Ole Peter Grell, and Jon Arrizabalaga, *Centres of Medical Excellence?: Medical Travel and Education in Europe, 1500–1789* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010), 247–267; and Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 195–197. This was the period of Arnau de Vilanova's tenure at Montpellier. See also Chapter 4.

Detailed descriptions of astrological cures and crowded philosophical sermons attest to popular interest in understanding scripture and the functioning of the natural and divine worlds in new ways relevant to Jewish life, in a time and place that was comparatively tolerant towards Jews and in itself flourishing intellectually.<sup>23</sup> Midrashic readings of the Bible, literalistic readings of aggadah, and halakhic exposition of the Talmud did not answer the need to bring the classical corpus to bear upon the tantalizing, competing knowledge saturating the intellectual landscape: knowledge about the inner, symbolic significance of the Bible; about the functioning of God's universe, including the wondrous and often-beleaguered human body; and about the historical meaning of a world Jewry long dominated politically by its daughter religions.

Widespread interest in "external wisdom" and its integration into the educational curriculum of the aristocratic class in Occitania had distinct consequences: it became acceptable and accessible. First, philosophy was undergoing a process, never completed, of becoming a part of Jewish tradition, with both its method and contents parlayed from master to disciple along the same transmission routes used to pass rabbinic thought from one generation to the next. Second, philosophy was becoming exoteric, available to those without the benefit of a master's guidance.

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<sup>23</sup> On the relative tolerance of Occitan Christian society towards Jews, see Ephraim E. Urbach, "Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri's Theory of Tolerance: Its Origins and Limits," in *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, edited by E. Etkes and Y. Salmon, 34-44 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980); Moshe Halbertal, *"Ones Possessed of Religion": Religious Tolerance in The Teachings of The Me'iri* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001); and Gerald J. Blidstein, "Menahem Meiri's Attitude toward Gentiles: Apologetics or Worldview?" in *Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages*, edited by Joseph Dan, 119-34 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), based on an earlier article, "Me'iri's Attitude Towards Gentiles between Apologetics and Internalization" [Hebrew], *Zion* 51 (1986): 153-66. The consensus suggests that ha-Meiri was able to argue that Christians should not be classed as idolaters but rather should be seen as occupying a different halakhic category due to the especial tolerance of his historic moment.

Both of these processes complicate the notion of “rationalist” and “traditionalist” in that Occitan rationalists could, and did, argue vociferously that philosophy was a part of the Occitan curriculum and of the region’s venerable intellectual tradition.<sup>24</sup> The acceptability and accessibility of philosophy served as both the impetus for Abba-Mari’s dire predictions about the fate of Jewish practice and as the chief objection to his agitation in favor of a ban on philosophical study. For if philosophy was so central to Occitan education and intellectual culture, in which the region’s upstanding and honorable men participated, how could it be as insidious as Abba-Mari warned? Abba-Mari was laboring against a tide of public interest, over a century in the making, which bolstered the many aristocrats who produced philosophical works and applied rationalist methodology to scripture. Moreover, a typical Occitan rationalist, while perhaps different in mentality from a staunch traditionalist such as Asher b. Yeḥiel, was not so distinct from his more traditional counterpart. He was likely to regard himself as a traditionalist, to impeccably observe ritual practices, and to continue to devote himself largely to the study of biblical and rabbinic texts. In other words, Abba-Mari’s response to the “rationalization” of Jewish intellectual production was reactionary, in the literal sense: it was a reaction to an established cultural norm, a norm which he attempted to frame as a deviation from his more conservative position.

Far from being a radical response to traditional *paideia*, Occitan rationalism was itself the mainstream while Abba-Mari’s traditionalism represents a reaction to the acceptability and

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<sup>24</sup> In his study of medieval Jewish education, Ephraim Kanarfogel remarks, “In the galaxy of twelfth- and thirteenth-century European Jewish scholarship the Tosafists alone remained uninvolved in the study of Jewish philosophy” (*Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992], 69).

accessibility of Greco-Islamic philosophy, which was no longer “external” in the same way that it had been when Joseph Qimḥi or Judah Ibn Tibbon first arrived in Occitania.<sup>25</sup> James T. Robinson has suggested that this integration of rationalism was achieved by means of “the development of a Maimonidean tradition of biblical commentary; the development of a Maimonidean method of exegesis; and the creation of a philosophical library in Hebrew to support the reading of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.”<sup>26</sup> He calls the “clearly defined philosophical-literary movement” created by this integration process *Maimonideanism*, and points out that thirteenth-century Occitania represents the first such development.<sup>27</sup>

#### MAIMONIDEAN MODERATES AND THE DIVERSE RESPONSE TO RATIONALISM

Indeed, the evidence of *Minḥat Qena’ot* does not portray binary positions on the value of “external wisdom”—Maimonideanism and anti-Maimonideanism in Robinson’s terminology—so much as a spectrum of response that was polarized by the introduction of a proposal to restrict study of non-Jewish philosophy. The reaction to the ban restricting the study of philosophy—first the theoretical idea of such a ban, and later the actual Barcelona ban and Occitan proposal—created two opposing camps. However, within each camp sat men whose opinions on the proper use of human reason were not altogether congenial to their fellow party members. Of those supporting

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<sup>25</sup> Moshe Halbertal refers to “the process of the transformation of philosophy into an exoteric culture” which takes place over the course of the thirteenth century (*Concealment and Revelation*, 114).

<sup>26</sup> James T. Robinson, “We Drink Only from the Master’s Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200-1306,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2008): 28.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, “Master’s Water,” 60.

the ban, some were in favor of restricting the study of all philosophy, including rationalistic treatises written by Jews, while others were more moderate and considered only that philosophy might lead to spiritual and social ills were it to befall the untrained mind. Similarly, those who opposed the ban ranged in opinion, some maintaining that philosophy was entirely compatible with Jewish tradition, while others agreed that it had potential for misuse, but disagreed that the institution of a ban was the proper means of curtailing the danger. Because opinions did not neatly align with the camps created by the proposal of a ban, many individuals were to withdraw their support for one side or the other during the course of the communal debate. One's support for or opposition to the ban did not necessarily correspond to entrenched conviction, and often masked the ambiguity surrounding the adoption of rationalism into Jewish intellectual culture.

Tellingly, the ban proposal, which limited philosophical study but did not make it impermissible, was supported by those who opposed rationalism altogether. Asher b. Yeḥiel was forthright about his view that philosophy was wholly unacceptable, but nevertheless became a public supporter of the ban:

How could I sign in favor of forbidding its [philosophy's] study before the age of twenty-five years, seemingly giving my permission [to study philosophy] after [attaining the age of] twenty-five, when in my view it is forbidden all of one's days, in this generation? Only so as not to discourage others [from signing], did I sign.<sup>28</sup>

Asher makes the point that his support for the ban was a matter of expediency; doing something was better than nothing, and he did not wish to deter others from supporting the partial solution by withholding his signature. Asher, a transplant from Ashkenaz, was the instigator of a far-reaching conservative shift in Iberia shaped by his experiences in a culture that had had far less

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<sup>28</sup> MQp 99, p. / MQd 119, p. 835, ll. 31-34.

contact with rationalism; he represented the far end of the spectrum as an outsider to the local culture and its developmental trajectory.<sup>29</sup> His views were anomalous, but he nevertheless supported the ban—which normalized philosophical study, as he recognized with discomfort—and held his tongue until far enough into the debate to allow the ban to come into fruition. Ibn Adret too, who moved farther along the scale towards traditionalism by the end of the debate (and his life), would hint at regretting that exclusion of Maimonides’ philosophical works in the ban.<sup>30</sup> However, it was an obvious and acceptable compromise to him and to Asher b. Yehiel to allow access to all philosophical works authored by Jews for all traditionalists. For all that ban proponents fulminated about the transgression latent in “Greek” thought, even those at the more conservative end of the spectrum never sought to ban philosophy altogether.

Conversely, some active proponents of the ban had doubts that rationalism posed any real danger to the community and questioned the necessity of such a measure. One of the main agents

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<sup>29</sup> On Ashkenazi influence on the Jewish communities of Christian Iberia in the late Middle Ages, see Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London and Portland, Or.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 263, 301-307; Avraham Grossman, “Relations between Spanish and Ashkenazic Jewry in the Middle Ages,” in *The Sephardi Legacy*, edited by Haim Beinart, 220-39 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) and “Between France and Spain” [Hebrew], in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart [Hebrew Volume]*, edited by Aaron Mirsky, Avraham Grossman and Yosef Kaplan, 75-101 (Jerusalem, 1988). On Ashkenazi contact with Greco-Islamic philosophy, see Jeffrey R. Woolf, “Admiration and Apathy: Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* in High and Late Medieval Ashkenaz,” in *Be’erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, edited by Jay M. Harris, 427-453 (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2005); Joseph Davis, “Drawing the Line: Views of Jewish Heresy and Belief among Medieval and Early Modern Ashkenazic Jews,” in *Rabbinic Culture and its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, edited by Matt Goldish and Daniel Frank, 161-94 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008); and Ephraim Kanarfogel, “Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of Anthropomorphism,” in *Rabbinic Culture and its Critics*, 117-60.

<sup>30</sup> MQp 89(b), p. 166 / MQd 110, p. 784, ll. 48-58.

in enacting the ban, Crescas Vidal, in fact argues that free will means that a certain degree of transgression is inevitable in Jewish society:

In every generation, in every city and in every state, people without sound mind will arise, who lack learning and all understanding, and say in their hearts, “Let’s make a name for ourselves on the basis of outside society, and see for ourselves what the Greeks wrote in the chronicles; for in them we will gain clear knowledge by means of reasoning and not by means of tradition.” Thus they sin in their intentions, making parables and allegories for the literal truth of the writings and the suitable *haggadot*,<sup>31</sup> for they have put their faces in the direction of the far-away nations that have not heard as we have heard nor seen as we have seen His glory, neither in visions nor in prophecies, but have merely attained knowledge by means of human intellect and that which occurred in their own minds. Nevertheless, if there are a few such quarrelsome men in this land, most here are “tent-dwellers”<sup>32</sup> who establish fixed times for the study of the Scripture and Mishnah, and establish fixed places for the study of Torah and sacred texts.<sup>33</sup>

Even if some men do cross the boundaries of the permissible, their numbers are few, Crescas argues; in any case, their transgression is one of ignorance and perhaps vanity, rather than the subversive desire to undermine the *qahal*. Such statements from among the highest ranks of the traditionalist “party” emphasize that the labels traditionalist and rationalist are best understood as falling on a spectrum, rather than binary.

In addition, the fluid and imprecise boundary between ban opponents and proponents is demonstrated by the fact that relatively many of the men named in *Minḥat Qena’ot* publicly switched their allegiance.<sup>34</sup> Some made their public entrance into the debate by affixing their

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<sup>31</sup> That is, those *haggadot* that are suitable to be understood literally and not figuratively.

<sup>32</sup> That is, upstanding men, after the description of Jacob in Genesis 25:27.

<sup>33</sup> MQp 12, p. 47 / MQd 30, pp. 366-367, ll. 20-29.

<sup>34</sup> Moshe Halbertal emphasizes this point as well; see *Concealment and Revelation*, 188, n. 12 and *Between Torah and Wisdom: Menahem ha-Me’iri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 174. Halbertal cites Jacob b. Makhir, Isaac b. Judah de Lattes, and Shelemiah de Lunel as

names to a letter written against the ban, only to regret their affiliation and beg the forgiveness of Ibn Adret or Abba-Mari. In the headnote introducing a letter by Ibn Adret, Abba-Mari reports that Ibn Adret informed him that “one leading aristocrat who signed the letter of the opposition (*ketav ha-mitnagdim*)<sup>35</sup> regretted giving that signature (*nitharet min ha-ḥatimah ha-bi*) and sent his apology to him [Ibn Adret].”<sup>36</sup> Even more interesting is Abba-Mari’s report about Samuel b. Reuben of Béziers (Levi b. Abraham’s cousin):<sup>37</sup>

He sent his letter to the rabbi [Ibn Adret], may God keep him, to apologize that he is found as a signatory to the letter of the opposition, for he had unintentionally transgressed (*shogeg*) and erred. This occurred because they [the ban opponents] came to his home early in the morning when he was drowsy.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, Samuel claims that he was ambushed by ban opponents when he was barely awake and signed without intending to assent to their position. The opposite situation also occurred, in which an individual signed a public letter on behalf of ban proponents but then decided to support the ban opponents. Isaac b. Judah de Lattes was such a case.<sup>39</sup> Lattes was tapped by Ibn Adret to

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exemplars of ambivalence and side-switching. Shelemiah later switched his allegiance to the support for the ban,, becoming one of the signatories of the circulatory letter advocating for the ‘Adrabbah (the counter to ban opponents’ counter-ban) along with Abba-Mari: MQp 78, p. 151 / MQd 97, p. 712, l. 149.

<sup>35</sup> This is almost certainly the letter of the Montpellier rationalists, MQp 24, pp. 66-68 / MQd 43, pp. 431-440.

<sup>36</sup> MQp 49, p. 104 / MQd 68, pp. 575-576, ll. 2-4. Interestingly, Abba-Mari directly quotes a line from this unnamed Montpellier aristocrat’s letter in the headnote (ll. 4-6, written in the first person), which is not otherwise preserved.

<sup>37</sup> On the relationship between Samuel and Levi, see Chapter 5.

<sup>38</sup> MQp 41, p. 89 / MQ d 60, p. 524, ll. 1-4.

<sup>39</sup> Isaac b. Judah is not to be confused with his famous grandson, Isaac b. Jacob Lattes, author of *Kiryat Sefer*, an elaborate *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* and enumeration of the 613 commandments whose first section, entitled *Sha’arei Zion*, includes much valuable citations of important Occitan figures. Isaac b. Judah is known to have written astronomic and scientific treatises as well as commentaries on the Talmud; see



serve as intermediary and peacemaker in the imbroglio between Abba-Mari and Shelemiah de Lunel. Presumably, Lattes was viewed by Ibn Adret as a natural ally and resource, and Abba-Mari professes surprise upon hearing that Lattes wrote a letter “going the way of the opposition in full force, shedding blood of war in peacetime.”<sup>40</sup> Abba-Mari was then informed that “after he [Lattes] signed the letter affixed with our signatures, he signed on behalf of the opposition.”<sup>41</sup> Lattes subsequently wrote another letter to Ibn Adret “going the way of the opposition, it seems to me,” as Abba-Mari notes, as if he is still somewhat surprised at Lattes’ defection.<sup>42</sup> Clearly Lattes switched allegiance after initially supporting the ban proponents, an emphatic and perhaps surprising move. Similarly, Saul b. Solomon and Judah b. Moses b. Isaac, two signatories of Abba-Mari’s hastily-written missive to Barcelona intending to obviate a damaging letter already dispatched by his opponents, are later found as signatories to a letter of the *kat ha-mitnagdim*.<sup>43</sup> Still others were reluctant to actively lend their support to the ban proponents, but came around to

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Isaac Alteras, “Jewish Physicians in Southern France during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 68, no. 4 (1978), 219.

<sup>40</sup> MQp 36, p. 80 / MQd 55, p. 492, ll. 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> MQp 36, p. 80 / MQd 55, p. 492, ll. 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> Abba-Mari makes this point in the headnote to a letter written by Ibn Adret in response to the letter by Lattes’ referenced by Abba-Mari, itself not preserved, MQp 43, p. 96 / MQd 62, p. 548, ll. 1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Saul and Judah first appear as two of the twenty-five signatories to Abba-Mari’s letter, MQp 23, p. 66 / MQd 41/42, p. 430, l. 64 and l. 65 (there are some significant variants in the signatories to this letter among the manuscripts, but Saul and Judah are consistently present); later, theirs are among the five preserved signatures to a letter Abba-Mari describes as “טפס כתב חכמי מונט פשלייר מכת המתנגדים לנכבדי קהל הקדש שבברצלונה יש צו”” MQd \*122, p. 853, l. 108 and l. 109 (but note l. 109, which states that numerous other signatures existed on the version being copied: “ורבים”).

it, apologizing for their hesitance.<sup>44</sup> Abba-Mari was convinced that Jacob b. Makhir, the consummate representative of the Occitan rationalist tradition, was not initially against the ban but was swayed by his cousin Judah b. Moses Ibn Tibbon.<sup>45</sup> That Abba-Mari could sensibly consider the scion of a founding family of the Occitan rationalist tradition as a potential ally is a strong indication that the lines between ban opponents and proponents are not easily drawn.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Menahem ha-Meiri explicitly professed to ban proponents that he “rejoiced...and praised you greatly” upon hearing that they were restricting sensitive knowledge to a controlled transmission path, becoming dismayed only when he realized the mechanism of doing so was a general ban.<sup>47</sup>

The ideas of the aristocrats represented in the *Minḥat Qena’ot* letters are perhaps best regarded on a scale of conservatism to progressivism, with most people clustering in the indistinct middle. Ultimately the two factions recognized by the participants were characterized not so much by the substance of their members’ beliefs as by their active support for a ban against underage philosophical study, or active campaigning against such a ban. It appears that most ban proponents

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the letters of Qalonymos ha-Nasi b. Todros of Narbonne (MQp 57, p. 121 / MQd 76, pp. 634-636) and Moses b. Isaac ha-Levi (N’Escapet Melit)(MQp 84, pp. 157-160 / MQd 105, pp. 752-761, and see especially ll. 90-92).

<sup>45</sup> MQp 21, p. 62 / MQd 39, p. 416, l. 30-35; and MQp 26, p. 70 / MQd 45, p. 445, ll. 11-20. Little is known about Judah, the son of Moses Ibn Tibbon and grandson of Samuel; Judah’s brother Samuel and sister Bella are known from their participation in a lawsuit recorded in a responsum by Ibn Adret, published by Adolf Neubauer in *Revue des études juives* 12 (1886).

<sup>46</sup> Moshe Halbertal takes Abba-Mari at his word, assuming that Jacob b. Makhir was initially sympathetic to the traditionalists (*Between Torah and Wisdom*, 174).

<sup>47</sup> Preserved in Simon b. Joseph’s *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, edited by David Kaufmann, in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz*, (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884), Heb. sec. 150. On ha-Meiri’s initial, ideologically-supportive stance, see Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature, Volume Three: The Struggle of Mysticism and Tradition Against Philosophical Rationalism*, translated by Bernard Martin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 90-91; and Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom*, 170-171.

accepted that the central question of the debate was *how*, not *if*, to integrate Greco-Islamic rationalism with rabbinic thinking, though some more reluctantly than others; otherwise, they could not have countenanced sanctioning the study of philosophy at any age.<sup>48</sup> Proponents of the legislation did not seek to ban ideas, instead directing the *herem* against those who studied or taught ideas inappropriately according to their view. The converse is also true: ban opponents in Montpellier who issued personal excommunications against those who supported the Barcelona measure did not censure proponents' *beliefs*, but rather their actions in the sphere of communal life.

#### A POLARIZING BAN

The idea of a ban on the study of philosophy before a given age, then, was a calculated measure to force allegiance, but which actually polarized the educated class, causing the moderate majority to choose sides not entirely representative of their actual views and encouraging those on the conservative end of the spectrum to support a measure that in some ways legitimized philosophy as well as restricting it. At least, this is the picture that emerges from the surviving statements of proponents during the genesis of the ban proposal. In the earliest concrete reference to the possibility of issuing an order of excommunication against youths who study philosophy, Crescas Vidal asserts that such a measure would be universally supported:<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Some scholars have argued the issue at stake in the 1304-1306 controversy was no longer Maimonides' works but the role of Greek philosophy in the educational curriculum: see Dov Schwartz, "Changing Fronts in the Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997): 62, 70-71.

<sup>49</sup> The terms of the ban itself were first suggested by Crescas Vidal, likely under the influence of Ibn Adret. The origin of the idea with Crescas has been noted in the scholarship, e.g. by Ram Ben-Shalom in "Communication and Propaganda Between Provence and Spain: The Controversy over Extreme

If you make an effort to convince the residents of the land, they will listen to your proposal to ban and excommunicate so that youths (*baḥurim*) who have not attained thirty years or more [of age] shall not study the books of the Greeks and the language of the Chaldeans, excepting medical books; and teachers should be included among the banned and excommunicated, for those who incline to such [rationalist] opinions become impassioned upon seeing that the youths discuss them in the marketplaces and in the streets, and in all corners. And if you do so [propose a ban], then the nation will stand [with you] harmoniously.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, it is possible that Crescas chose to present the Perpignan aristocrats as uniformly supportive, because he personally favored a ban, or so as to flatter Ibn Adret; this is certainly the case in Abba-Mari's similar, though less direct, appeal, in his second letter to Ibn Adret.<sup>51</sup>

Considering that he is clearly not averse to conveying contrary opinions and ambiguity, it may be that Crescas is being pragmatic here, suggesting what he deems a reasonable measure that most aristocrats would not object to. If so, this was a measure expected to generate allegiance, perhaps designed to elicit support from the aristocracy. Instead, it pitted those who supported the ban against those who opposed it, as though their ideological views were strongly divergent. If the purpose of the ban proposal was, in fact, to force this type of artificial polarization, this tactical aim is unacknowledged.

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Allegorization(1303-1306)," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: The Pre-Modern World*, edited by Sophia Menache, 171-225 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 186-187. It is perhaps significant that the terms of the ban were suggested so early in the debate—it is as if a *herem* was the obvious solution to the problem. See also Abba-Mari's intimations about this solution in MQp 5, p. 31 / MQd 23, p. 315, ll. 58-61: "Should there be a single person from the city he will be placed under ban. If he does not repent of his sin and will not keep his mouth from sinning, then he will be brought under the rod and shall die under the covenant insofar as our teacher has taught us that it is obligatory to judge his people under the scepter [Simon b. Gamliel in Sanhedrin 16b on the basis of Deuteronomy 16:18]."

<sup>50</sup> MQp 12, p. 48 / MQd 30, pp. 371-372, ll. 100-105.

<sup>51</sup> MQp 5, p. 32 / MQd 23, pp. 317-318, ll. 89-95. Abba-Mari's appeal to Ibn Adret is made mostly on the (flattering) basis of Ibn Adret's great authority, as opposed to guarantees of unanimous support.

The real effect of the ban proposal was to create factional grouping based on reactions to the legislation rather than on reactions to the role of philosophy. Various words are used in *Minḥat Qena'ot* to describe these factions, including *kitot*, *'agudot*, and *'edot*. Abba-Mari first refers to his opponents as “the opposing faction” (*kat ha-mitnagdim*) in the initial letter from the Montpellier traditionalists, which he penned and to which twenty-four of his supporters appended their signatures, to the Barcelona *qahal*.<sup>52</sup> This term was to be reused frequently in the exchange between him and Ibn Adret. Soon thereafter, Abba-Mari labeled Shelemiah de Lunel as being “from the opposing faction”;<sup>53</sup> as discussed in Chapter 1, the two men, likely relatives, had become entangled in a bitter quarrel following Shelemiah’s refusal to abandon the opponents and support the ban, as Ibn Adret had asked him to do.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps most often, the ban opponents are referred to in the letters simply as “the opposition” (*ha-mitnagdim*), as mentioned above. Abba-Mari goes so far as to call the opposition *ha-kat ha-Yevanit*, “the Greek faction.”<sup>55</sup> Rarely are they referred to as “philosophers,” i.e., rationalists, as in Abba-Mari’s depiction of his opponents in the Introduction to his work as “Ziphites who holler and bray, wise philosophizers in their own eyes.”<sup>56</sup> The ban proponents do not employ a particular term to describe their own party, although in one place, Ibn

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<sup>52</sup> MQp 23, p. 64 / MQd 41/42, p. 425, l. 1.

<sup>53</sup> MQd 52.1, p. 470, ll. 9-10.

<sup>54</sup> See MQp 30, pp. 75-76 / MQd 49, pp. 461-466.

<sup>55</sup> MQp 5, p. 30 / MQd 23, p. 212, l. 19. Note the textual variants והכית and והכות in place of [היונית]; MQp has והכות.

<sup>56</sup> Based upon 1 Samuel 26:1, in which the residents of Ziph betray David, who is hiding in their territory, to Saul. MQp Introduction, p. 3 / MQd Introduction, p. 267, l. 33.

Adret uses the word *'edah* to describe the traditionalists: he calls them “a holy group.”<sup>57</sup> Abba-Mari wrote to his associate Moses b. Isaac b. Asher in Perpignan that he contacted Ibn Adret in hopes that he would be able to form an *'agudah* (union) to rein in the problematic parties.<sup>58</sup>

The political rather than ideological nature of factional grouping is evident in Moses b. Samuel b. Asher's report from Perpignan, the most detailed description of group formation in *Minḥat Qena'ot*:

When a few members of our community saw the letters circulating in our city—it is not possible to copy them here, so as not to arouse the suspicion that I am associated with their content, which I am not—they divided into three factions (*katot*). One faction says: Who is one man, [even] one among thousands who has been chosen as the preeminent in this generation, to judge the way for all people or communities? ...Another faction says: How is it that they do not have criteria for discerning a servant of God from one who does not worship Him? ...Another faction says: “holy, holy, [holy,]”: they are saying the truth, and their view of the Torah is correct, and the true Torah is on their tongues.<sup>59</sup>

As Moses describes it, only some among the Perpignan aristocracy were troubled by the activities of the ban proponents; but those who were appear to have taken the matter quite seriously. The three groups that he describes, which he terms *kitot*, are not hard-and-fast factions but types of reactions to the proposed ban and, more generally, the idea that the study of rationalist materials should be limited. The first group is affronted by the idea that any one person, even someone with the high stature of Ibn Adret, should legislate for the *kelal*, i.e., on the supra-communal level. The second group seems primarily critical of traditionalists' lack of clarity on what constitutes transgression; they suggest that the implications of a ban are sufficiently grave that the

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<sup>57</sup> MQp 14, p. 50 / MQd 32, p. 376, l. 28.

<sup>58</sup> MQp 19, p. 59 / MQd 37, p. 408, l. 48-49.

<sup>59</sup> MQp 18, p. 57 / MQd 36, p. 401-402, ll. 30-37.

traditionalists' accusations need greater scrutiny. The third group, in contrast to the first two, is strongly in support of anti-rationalist measures.<sup>60</sup> These three *groups* essentially belong to only two *factions*, one that is against limiting the study of non-Jewish philosophical texts and one in favor of it. The constituents of the former may have different reasons for taking the position that they claim, as Moses is at pains to point out, but they are critical of the ban and the ideas behind it.

Although there was great efficacy in forcing a response for or against the ban proposal—for opponents as well as proponents—the divisiveness in itself was a matter of great concern to all. This has a basis in the talmudic principle of *lo' titgodedu*, which, according to tannaitic interpretation, recommended against the formation of factions and in favor of a united community.<sup>61</sup> According to Ephraim E. Urbach, this principle “was already considered in the period of the Tannaim a desideratum to be prayed for and corresponded to the reality only in a very general way.”<sup>62</sup> Abba-Mari was criticized for causing such divisiveness by members of the Perpignan *qahal* as well as by those of his own community in Montpellier, and he sent letters of apology concerning both.<sup>63</sup> He also tiptoed gingerly around Ben Makhir's bald attempts to gather

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<sup>60</sup> The antecedent is unclear, but the letters to which these three groups are reacting were apparently those written by Ibn Adret and Bonafos Vidal (see MQp 18, p. 57 / MQd 36 p. 401, ll. 27-28). These are likely MQp 10, 11, 13, and 14 / MQd 28, 29, 31, and 32 (and perhaps also MQp 15, 16, and 17 / MQd 33, 34, and 35).

<sup>61</sup> This is an interpretation of Deut. 14:1, “לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא תִשְׁיִמוּ קֶרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לְמֵת,” understood in context in the sense of prohibiting self-mutilation. The *locus* of the rabbinic reading (לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אֲגוּדוֹת) is Sifrei Devarim, 96, and is instrumental to the argument in Yevamot 13b.

<sup>62</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 618.

<sup>63</sup> Apology for the *mahloqet* in Perpignan: MQp 19, pp. 58-59 / MQd 37, pp. 404-408; apology for the *mahloqet* in Montpellier: MQp 25, 68-70 / MQd 44, pp. 440-444 and MQp 26, pp. 70-71 / MQd 45, pp. 444-448.

supporters into his own group within the *qahal*. Abba-Mari makes sure to note that he took pains to notify all prominent members of the community that he was convening a meeting, but few showed up. Those who did attend were nearly unanimous in agreeing that a ban was necessary, he emphasizes. Only when Ben Makhir stepped in did two factions form; and even here, Abba-Mari says only, “He [Ben Makhir] enlarged upon his viewpoints as he wished until [those he swayed] *almost* became a faction.”<sup>64</sup> The formation of factions was at once problematic and desirable for those concerned about the impact of philosophy on Jewish intellectual life.

By framing the response to the question of philosophy’s role in the curriculum in terms of support or opposition to a piece of legislation, ban proponents bypass the more difficult matter of defining and defending their views on the authority of rationalism as a means of ascertaining truth. The participants in the debate were subsequently characterized *by its instigators* in relation to their willingness to “build a fence around the Torah,” rather than by the substance of their beliefs about philosophy itself.<sup>65</sup> To Abba-Mari and Ibn Adret, those who opposed restricting the study of non-Jewish philosophy were simply defined by their opposition to this measure, which is why they consistently refer to them as *mitnagdim* and not *mitpalsefim*.

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<sup>64</sup> MQd 21, p. 63 / MQd 39, p. 418, l. 60 (emphasis mine).

<sup>65</sup> An exception is the letter circulated late in the course of the controversy by six Montpellier ban opponents after their promulgation of their counter-ban, in which they describe themselves as “מאמיני” החדוש וההשגחהמרחיקי הגשמות” (MQp 78, p. 149 / MQd 97, p. 712, ll. 55-56).



#### THE BAN'S TACTICAL USE OF ESOTERICISM

The ban proposal itself was a compromise measure that admitted of the value of (some) philosophy and recommended that it be used in the educational curriculum in a manner similar to that of other esoteric Jewish traditions. For moderates, philosophy belonged in the same realm as other legitimate esoteric knowledge, as expressed in the rabbinic parable of the four who entered the orchard (*pardes*).<sup>66</sup> While esoteric knowledge implied danger to the unprepared—including insanity, heresy or apostasy, and death—and thus required a restricted route of transmission governed by individual instruction, its truth value is not diminished by its esotericism. In fact, esoteric knowledge could be considered deeper, more complex, and closer to the upper limit of human comprehension.<sup>67</sup> The specific category of thought for which esotericism was prescribed in rabbinic literature was mysticism, due to the potential of mystical precepts to be misunderstood and thereby cause crises of faith and even mental incompetence. However, mystical ideas and practices were attributed to a number of Tannaitic and 'Amoraic figures, placing these ideas squarely within the rabbinic tradition; their danger was intrinsic, part and parcel of their nature, but not a result of their externality to the rabbinic tradition.<sup>68</sup> Thus mysticism, including the

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> This argument builds on the work of Moshe Halbertal in *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> See, *inter alia*, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1946), 49-79, and *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, translated by Aubrey Pomerance (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); and Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford and Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

Qabbalah of medieval Occitan provenance, generally enjoyed a peaceful coexistence with the rabbinic worldview that served as the framework for halakhah.

While philosophy presented many of the same dangers as did mysticism to the vulnerable seeker, especially that of ideational transgression (apostasy or insanity, in the terminology of the *pardes* parable), these potential dangers arose from philosophy's lack of revelatory status and its externality to rabbinic transmission. Nevertheless, ban proponents built upon this internal paradigm for transmitting sensitive knowledge, suggesting for philosophy precisely the kind of esoteric teaching employed for the transmission of mysticism. Ban opponents rejected this proposal, instead regarding the suggestion that philosophical study be restricted to esoteric pathways as an unnecessary measure and excessive meddling in a positive area of Occitan *paideia*.

Abba-Mari and the other ban proponents reflexively define the traditional as that which is transmitted internally, within the Jewish community: "It should be more than enough for us to concern ourselves with the code of our holy rabbi [Maimonides] and to hold onto the root of belief which was received from the sages, fathers of the world, the sages of the Talmud," Abba-Mari writes, urging against speculative reasoning about the purpose of the commandments.<sup>69</sup> Authoritative knowledge has its origin in prophecy and is transmitted to the *Zugot*, and then to the Tannaim and Amoraim, "and because this is so, we can be certain that there is nothing in their teaching that contradicts aspects of the Torah or deviates from principles of faith."<sup>70</sup> By

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<sup>69</sup> MQp ch. 3, p. 6 / MQd 3, pp. 233-234, ll. 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> MQp SY 3, pp. 125-126 / MQd SY 3, p. 650, ll. 1-3. The type of knowledge addressed in this statement refers to the totality of wisdom described in the previous chapter, including the scattered knowledge that originated in the Sinaitic revelation but was dispersed among the nations; on this, see below. However, it

“internally,” then, he meant that which falls within the talmudocentric curriculum that formed the basis of the medieval Jewish educational system, and which was taught, discussed, and preserved in Hebrew and Aramaic for the consumption of educated members of world Jewry.<sup>71</sup> Isadore Twersky describes the traditional curriculum as consisting of “Biblical exegesis, midrash, Talmudic study, pietistic thought, liturgical poetry,” in contrast to the subjects and methods Jews assimilated from Islamic intellectual culture, which consist of “non-liturgical poetry, comparative linguistics, philosophy and natural science.”<sup>72</sup> Between 1150 and 1300, however, when philosophy was slowly incorporated into intellectual life, it was taught in the manner of talmudic studies, which is to say openly and without restriction.<sup>73</sup>

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expresses Abba-Mari’s view of authoritative transmission paths, taken directly from the *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* described in Pirkei ’Avot.

<sup>71</sup> On traditional curricula, see Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 155-170; Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society*, 15-32; Abraham Gross, “Centers of Study and Yeshivot in Spain,” in *The Sephardi Legacy*, edited by Haim Beinart (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 399-410; and B. Z. Benedikt, *The Center of Torah Study in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1985), 8-12. Of course, the traditional curriculum was not static throughout the medieval period, itself undergoing significant and divergent developments in the northern and Mediterranean regions, including critic-comparative innovations and efforts at standardization and codification: see, *inter alia*, Gerald J. Blidstein, “Method in the Study of Talmud,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 2 (1971): 186-192; Haim Soloveitchik, “Catastrophe and Halakhic Creativity: Ashkenaz, 1096, 1242, 1306 and 1298,” *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (1998): 71-85; and Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists: Their History, Writings and Methods* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), 1:17-21, 32-45 and especially 2: 676-734.

<sup>72</sup> Isadore Twersky, “Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry,” in *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson and Samuel Ettinger, 185-207 (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1971), 195.

<sup>73</sup> Twersky, “Aspects,” 190-198 and *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1962), 258-259; Hava Tirosch-Samuels, “Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200-1600,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, 218-257 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Moshe Idel, “We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides: Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, edited by Isadore Twersky, 52-63 (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

In medieval Judaism, the external was not necessarily exoteric, nor was the internal necessarily esoteric, a situation that ban proponents used tactically. As the core of Jewish education and intellectual production, Talmud study, the traditional and internal subject par excellence, was by definition exoteric, openly taught and discussed; as philosophy was integrated into the curriculum, it too became a matter of public discussion. That is, while Talmud and philosophy were considered to be internal and external forms of knowledge, respectively, both were exoteric.<sup>74</sup> It was precisely the exoteric nature of philosophy, in concert with its externality, which ban proponents identified as insidious to society. Thus, in the process of identifying the traditional as internal and exoteric, ban proponents essentially recommended that the *hokhmot hizzoniyot* be reclassified as esoteric. This meant that the most traditional knowledge was identified as the least guarded, while the most novel, foreign knowledge was permitted if kept inaccessible and secretive.<sup>75</sup>

In his theological introductory treatise, Abba-Mari establishes the need for restraint in examining *any* type of speculative, metaphysical subject. There, Abba-Mari justifies the restriction on speculative thought with an original interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:12:

He [Solomon] said, “And furthermore, against these, my son, be warned: Of making books there is no end, and much study is a wearying of the flesh” [Ecclesiastes 12:12]. A particularly good and attractive interpretation of it [this verse] is made by the scholar Ibn Janāḥ: “my son, be warned: of making (*ʿasot*) books,”<sup>76</sup> [which should be read] in the sense

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<sup>74</sup> Qabbalah, meanwhile, serves as a contemporary example of a source of knowledge deemed internal and esoteric; the theoretically possible fourth category, external and esoteric, was precisely the one recommended by the ban proposal for philosophy to occupy.

<sup>75</sup> On the existence of a secret knowledge within Judaism and the traditional esoteric route prescribed for its study, see Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, 8-12.

<sup>76</sup> Jonah (Abū al-Walīd Marwān) Ibn Janāḥ (Iberian, fl. first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century). This citation is from *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* (*The Book of Variegated Flower-Beds*; translated by Judah Ibn Tibbon as *Sefer ha-Riqmah*), the first, grammatical part of Ibn Janāḥ’s masterwork of Hebrew philology, *Kitāb al-Tanqīḥ* (*The Book of*

of [refrain] from making (*mi-‘asot*), as in [Exodus 19:12] “Beware of going (*‘alot*) up the mountain,” which means [refrain] from going up (*mi-‘alot*) the mountain. The point is, that he [the son] should not increase his investigations and compose books about a subject infinite in scope—which is to say, those things which are hidden, which the human mind cannot contain so as to comprehend their purpose. Moreover, I can bring evidence to bear upon this interpretation, that Solomon indeed intended to caution against and to prevent the making of such books, and did *not* intend to caution and command that they *be* made, as many others have interpreted, taking *making books* (*‘asot sefarim*) in the sense of *to make books* (*le-‘asot sefarim*), as it says in the midrash, “And furthermore, against these (*mehe mah*),’ [meaning] anyone who brings more than twenty-four books in his house, brings tumult (*mehe mah*) into his home.”<sup>77</sup> In my opinion, they derive this [interpretation] from the word *mehe mah*, since he [Solomon] should properly have said “from them (*mi-hem*)” but he [purposely] said *mehe mah*, [in order to] hint at disorder (*mehe mah*).

Concerning that which they [the sages], may they be blessed, said about “more than twenty-four books,” what they meant is the books and [also] their interpretation. Solomon meant to warn that no person should enter into a place that the Torah does not permit him to go. This is what they [the sages] of blessed memory said in reference to what one is permitted to investigate. The place up to which the Torah permits us to go has already been determined for us by our rabbis in the chapter “Ein Dorshim” [Ḥagigah Chapter 2, pp. 11b–20b], “From one end of the heavens to the other you may seek answers, but you may not seek answers concerning what is above and what is below, what is behind and what is in front.”<sup>78</sup>

Bolstered by the Talmud and Ibn Janāḥ, Abba-Mari asserts scriptural authority for his contention that speculative thought about matters essentially unknowable to the limited human mind is impermissible. While he does not explicitly connect such matters with mysticism, mystical speculation certainly fits his definition of impermissible subjects as including the “infinite” (*davar she-‘ein lo qetz*), “hidden” (*ba-devarim ha-nistarim*), and “incomprehensible to the human mind” (*‘asher lo takhil ha-sekheh ha-‘enoshi*), which are the cause of tumult (*mehe mah*) and are expressly forbidden in the Talmud. Specifically, it is metaphysical speculation that Abba-Mari considers to

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*Minute Research*; Ibn Tibbon: *Sefer ha-Diqduq*); in Michael Wilensky’s edition of Judah Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1928–1930; Reprint, Jerusalem, 1964), 282.

<sup>77</sup> Qohelet Rabbah 12:12.

<sup>78</sup> MQp Ch. 17, p. 18 / MQd 17, p. 266–267, ll. 22–34.

be potentially troublesome: he reads “from one end of the heavens to the other you may seek answers” as allowing rationalistic investigation of the physical universe in contradistinction to the metaphysical universe. Following the citation from Ḥagigah, he continues:

From this we learn that we are permitted to seek and to investigate the existence of the entire lower [earthly] world and all that it contains, which is composed of the elements of the emanated forces (*koḥot ha-mitpashtot*) which derive from the spheres and the stars, and the existence of the upper [celestial] world up to the convexity of the sphere of the fixed stars, which is the uppermost of all of the star-containing spheres; and [we are permitted] to investigate their motions and their number, thereby comprehending the omnipotence and wisdom of their Creator, may He be blessed, with whom there is no comparison.<sup>79</sup>

Essentially, humans are confined to seeking technical answers rather than metaphysical or theological ones.

Having presented speculative thought of all kinds as subject to restriction, Abba-Mari goes on to connect appropriate transmission of sensitive subjects with age restrictions. It is here that he builds more directly on the rabbinic model for transmitting esoteric knowledge. In support of age restrictions, Abba-Mari cites *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* 1:34, in which Maimonides details the five situations that preclude the teaching of mysticism to a would-be initiate, and suggests that attaining a certain age is a prerequisite even for one who is otherwise qualified. Specifically, Maimonides cites the passage from Ḥagigah 14a in which Rabbi Yoḥanan seeks to initiate Rabbi

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<sup>79</sup> MQp Ch. 17, p. 18 / MQd 17, p. 266-267, ll. 34-37. Here Abba-Mari understands the rabbinic principle in the literal sense of permitting astronomic investigation of particular parameters, extending from the earth up to the sphere of the fixed stars, the highest sphere according to the Aristotelianized Ptolemaic model, beyond which was the quintessential realm of the Prime Mover. It is characteristic of his moderateness that he reads the rabbinic injunction against speculative thought as expressly permitting and even encouraging investigation by means of astronomy, a branch of philosophy.

Elazar into *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, to which Rabbi Elazar objects on the ground that “I am not yet old.”<sup>80</sup> Abba-Mari remarks,

From here we must draw several *a fortiori* points for which there is no refutation. What is wisdom but that which is taken from the books of the sages of Israel and from the mouths of the great ones who are like the angel of the Lord of Multitudes? It is necessary to be careful and to increase vigilance so that he who enters does not break through into its midst.<sup>81</sup> Excepted is the perfected man who may be described by these attributes: modest and having attained half of his days. All the more so, when we come to scrape the honey [philosophy] from the honeycomb,<sup>82</sup> to remove onyx stones from among the venom of asps and to make balm from the flesh of an adder, whose bite we must beware of and whose sting we must escape. Woe to us from their hiss, woe to us from their quill.<sup>83</sup>

Here in *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, Abba-Mari suggests that if attaining half of one's days—traditionally assumed to mean the age of forty—is requisite for learning the sort of wisdom that comes from “the mouths of the great ones who are like the angel of the Lord,” then age limits are all the more important for learning the sort of wisdom that comes from philosophers.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Abba-Mari cites *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* 1:34 in Chapter 3 of *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, MQp SY 3, p. 126 / MQd SY 3 652, ll. 10-17. He makes one slight transcription error which emphasizes his point, changing “והתבונן איך התנו בספריהם שלמות האיש בהנהגות המדיניות ובחכמות העיוניות עם זכות טבע והבנה וטוב ספור דברים להודיע” to “ואין מוסרין לו סתרי תורה” i.e., even then, he is not instructed until he attains sufficient age. On the pericope from *Hagigah* and its use in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, see Chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> The idiom (“שלא יהרס ליכנס”) is modeled on Exodus 19:21 and 24, in which Moses warns the people not to “break through to the Lord” and “break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them.”

<sup>82</sup> Judges 14:9, used elsewhere in conjunction with Proverbs 25:16, a verse connected with the dangers of speculation and used elsewhere in greater detail by Abba-Mari; see below.

<sup>83</sup> MQp SY 5, p. 126 / MQd SY 5, p. 652, ll. 1-7.

<sup>84</sup> This is a more qualified view than that which Abba-Mari implied in his theological introduction, written at least a year after *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, in which he suggests that metaphysical speculation is impermissible.



A MODERATE RESPONSE : REVELATION LOST, THEN FOUND?

One of the ways in which Maimonidean moderates attempted to legitimize philosophy—even while struggling to restrict it to esoteric teaching—was to argue that it had originally been revealed to Jews and subsequently lost due to the exigencies of exile, whereupon it was rediscovered by Egyptians, Greeks, others.<sup>85</sup> Abba-Mari addresses the point directly in Chapter Six of *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*:<sup>86</sup>

On account of the multiplication of our transgressions, from the time we were exiled from our land, the wisdom of our sages was lost along with our lost books which concerned esoteric matters, that is, the world's mystery.<sup>87</sup> A very small part of these things, which are like mountains suspended by a hair, were copied from them [the lost books] into the books of the nations and dispersed among peoples, including among them the books of investigation (*sifrei ha-mehqar*) composed by the Greek sages; if there is a smidgen of honey to be found within them of the kind hinted at by Solomon in his saying “Have you found honey” and so on,<sup>88</sup> then from them we shall take the absolute miracle of the existence of God, may He be blessed, and His unity, and the removal of his corporeality. This is in light of the first two [of the Ten] Commandments, “I am” and “You shall not have.”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> See Abraham Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> *Sefer ha-Yare'ah* is discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>87</sup> The phrase “the world's mystery” (כְּבִשְׁנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם) is an interpretative reading of Proverbs 27:26 (כְּבִשִּׁים לְלִבּוֹשֶׁךָ וּמַחֲוִיר שְׂדֵה עֲתוּדִים), in the context of the discussion of the esoteric teaching of Ma'aseh Merkavah in Ḥagigah 13a. By reading *kevasim* as *kivshonim*, the midrash conflates the world's mysteries with that which must be concealed under one's clothing, *li-levushekha*: ר' אבהו אמר מהכא כבשים ללבושך דברים שהן כבשוננו של עולם יהיו תחת לבושך. Abba-Mari is thus referring here to the class of mysteries that must be transmitted esoterically. This builds upon Maimonides' similar contention in *Moreh* 1:71.

<sup>88</sup> Proverbs 25:16 (דָּבַשׁ מִצֵּאתָ אֲכָל דִּינָךְ פֶּן-תִּשְׁבַּעְנִי וְהִקְאֵתוּ), associated in Ḥagigah 14b with Ben Zoma who entered the orchard (i.e., realm of esoteric knowledge) and lost his faculties. On the significance of the *pardes* parable to the discussion of transgressive thought in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, see Chapter 4. Cf. *Moreh* 1:32, which includes an extended discussion of this verse in relation to intellectual preparation for higher knowledge, including prophecy.

<sup>89</sup> MQp SY 6, pp. 126-127 / MQd SY 6, p. 653, ll. 1-7.



Abba-Mari's ambivalence is fully evidenced here. He first asserts that any truth that resides within the books of the Greeks has its origin in the legitimate authorities of Judaism. This truth has been adulterated, however, as it was jumbled and transmitted among the nations without regard for protocol. Whatever truth remains in foreign books is in fact that which is consonant with internally-preserved truths, namely the existence, unity, incorporeality of God. At the same time as he denigrates the truth-value of philosophy—it is corrupted, it is meager—Abba-Mari also turns to it to bolster his views that were less commented upon and supported in rabbinic literature, and which were still the subject of controversy in his day, especially the notions of God's essential unity and incorporeality. In relying upon philosophy in this way, Abba-Mari makes the claim that its truths are best accessed by means of the same channels traditionally employed for preserving other such esoteric truths, such as the mystical *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Though peripheral, corrupt, even dangerous, he advocates a place for philosophical truths within the tradition, on the grounds that they originated within it.

Whereas moderates invoked the notion of “philosophy lost” to rationalize the cautious (esoteric) inclusion of useful philosophical knowledge into Jewish thought, others used it to demonstrate the validity of philosophy for general (exoteric) consumption. In the unique ban opponents' letter preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, the authors point out that the rabbinic sages made use of astronomy for calendrical calculations. They argue that this implies that philosophy is, at least in one sense, internal to the Jewish tradition:

Given that our masters of blessed memory concerned themselves with knowledge of the spheres [astronomy], they were knowledgeable of its [astronomy's] esoteric dimension,

holding to wisdom and delving into it, seeking<sup>90</sup> in its depths and in the chambers of the sea [of knowledge], receiving true tradition (*meqablim qabbalah*) regarding measured amounts, quantities, and distances. They were wiser than the scholars of Egypt and other ancient peoples, and [wiser] than the rationalizing philosophers, from Ptolemy, Aristotle, and their successors who commented upon their works, may all of them alike have their bones crushed.<sup>91</sup> For what does straw have to do with wheat?<sup>92</sup> [Do they not belong to two different categories?]<sup>93</sup>

Here ban opponents argue that rabbinic assimilation of worldly, reasoned knowledge for the purposes of calendrication and other such calculations (they subsequently mention animal biology) is not unlike their own integration of philosophy into Jewish thought. Elsewhere they state more explicitly that all knowledge has a common origin in God's creation and revelation:

One thing has God spoken in His sanctuary, putting wisdom in its innermost parts; two things have I heard:<sup>94</sup> that two faces were created, Torah that is written down and Torah that is transmitted orally, daughters of a single mother, who [then] gave birth to boys and girls. Thus were a brother and sister carved out of the rock of Horeb [i.e., Mount Sinai] and chiseled out of its grottoes, constituting all knowledge, [all branches of] which are chips of the tablets [on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed].<sup>95</sup> Of the fifty

<sup>90</sup> The word שוללים is problematic here, and I have translated according to the textual variant in mss. ב, ג, ד, and ו, preserved also in MQp, which has שואלים. Dimitrovsky suggests that שוללים is a corruption of צוללים, a sound suggestion, though I have preferred to follow the extant variants (see the apparatus and note to l. 46, p. 435).

<sup>91</sup> The phrase I have translated as “may their bones be crushed,” שְׁחִיק טַמְנָא, is a malediction used interchangeably with שְׁחִיק עֲצָמוֹת in reference to the Roman emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138 C.E.), who suppressed the Bar Kokhvah revolt and persecuted leading rabbinic figures, in Bereshit Rabbah (78:1; 10:3 and 28:3).

<sup>92</sup> Based upon Jeremiah 23: 28, which deals with the distinction between dreams and prophecy.

<sup>93</sup> MQp 24, p. 67 / MQd 43, p. 435, ll. 45-49.

<sup>94</sup> Based upon Psalms 62:12 and 150:1 and Job 38:36.

<sup>95</sup> Based upon Nedarim 38a.

gates of wisdom created in the world, all were given to Moses save for one<sup>96</sup> [so that he would remain humble].<sup>97</sup>

The ban opponents argue that all truth originates in revelation (is “carved out of the rock of Horeb”), and that the preservation of God’s revelation in multifarious texts (“chips of the tablets”) further demonstrates the consonance of philosophical knowledge with Torah. If the Torah itself is transmitted both orally and in writing, if knowledge was granted to Moses via forty-nine gates, than “internal” and “external” are merely descriptive, carrying no charge of relative value. By classing philosophy with other revealed wisdom, the rationalists seek to internalize and thus legitimize it.

#### THE REDUCTIONIST NATURE OF FACTIONAL GROUPINGS

Ban proponents and opponents varied primarily in their support for or opposition to limiting the study of philosophy, and even on this issue there was a great deal of ambivalence, with individuals withdrawing their support or apologetically extending it. The most pronounced ideological distinctions between proponents and opponents concerned the relative value and authority they placed on knowledge viewed as external to transmission via text and education within the Jewish community. There were, on either end of the spectrum, those who affirmed the complete harmony and importance of reasoned knowledge from whatever source it may derive, and those who saw no value whatsoever in external wisdom. However, the majority of participants in the debate clustered in the middle, asserting the value of non-Jewish philosophy while at the same

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<sup>96</sup> The phrase also occurs in Nedarim 38a.

<sup>97</sup> MQp 24, p.67 / MQd 43, p. 433, ll. 27-31.

time remaining cautious about its potential to promote subversive behavior based on ideological convictions. The ban itself was an attempt at a moderate response, seeking only to limit and not to preclude the study of rationalist philosophy. However, the actual effect of the ban proposal was to polarize the moderate majority and force a show of loyalty to one or the other side. The solution adopted by ban proponents was both novel and moderate, securing for philosophy a protected space within the curriculum by applying to it an esoteric limitation heretofore reserved for the most sensitive part of traditional Jewish knowledge, mysticism.

Ideational transgression is a concept mentioned throughout *Minḥat Qena'ot*, functioning as a serious but commonplace accusation of impropriety in religious matters, without ever being defined explicitly by its users. In spite of the great interest in standardization, codification, and reinterpretation in the century prior to the 1304–1306 controversy, ban proponents reference rabbinic conceptualizations of the transgressive in their writings without developing them further into technical terms or halakhic categories. Though living in a post-Maimonidean world, the ban proponents did not utilize Maimonides' systematic definitions of boundaries of belief; they were largely uninfluenced by Maimonides' paradigm-changing *Mishneh Torah* (and *Sefer ha-Madda'* in particular), except in their general preoccupation with matters of belief.

In spite of their non-analytical approach, it is clear that ban proponents understood there to be boundaries to Jewish thought and behavior beyond which one transgresses, a type of transgression often characterized as “heresy” but, as discussed in the Introduction, more fittingly termed “ideational transgression”: behavioral transgression specifically arising from a consciously-held belief (as opposed to simple ignorance, banal laziness, physical temptation, and so on). The ban proponents' conceptualization of the ideation capable of producing this type of transgression must be reconstructed through careful consideration of the propagandistic “slogans” they used repeatedly in reference to rationalistic preaching and writing, as well as their discussion of potentially idolatrous medical talismans and their broader descriptions of problematic ideas and behaviors in their communities. Their conceptualization, as it emerges from such a reconstruction, emphasizes the centrality of specific ideas to Judaism: the historicity of biblical narratives, the

world's createdness, the existence of prophecy and supernatural miracles, and divine providence. Believing otherwise, Abba-Mari and his supporters intimate, leads (if not inevitably, than in all likelihood) to transgression of ritual acts, halakhic norms, and other serious impropriety threatening to the civic life and salvific status of the collective.

If ban proponents agreed that ideational transgression consists of wrongful ideas leading to improper behaviors, they differed among themselves on the question of how beliefs and actions were causally linked. The more moderate among proponents understood incorrect beliefs as potentially leading to transgression, yet distinct from active transgression. According to this view, an idea may be corrosive and insidious without being *categorically* wrong. As noted in the previous chapter, thinkers of a more conservative bent gave their backing to a ban which recognized this moderate view—that holding incorrect beliefs does not in and of itself constitute transgression—in service to what they perceived as a greater good. However, it bears note that some proponents of the ban viewed ideas and behaviors as integrally linked, with incorrect beliefs leading inevitably to antinomian behavior; or, put another way, they approach the position that holding a false belief is in itself transgressive. Although his views were more nuanced, Ibn Adret would make this fundamental point by stating that appropriate behavior does not absolve one of the charge of harboring inappropriate ideas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Adret made this statement in reference to Samuel ha-Sulami, who hired and boarded Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim, and whom Crescas Vidal identified as a possible transgressor in his initial report on the situation in Perpignan. However, Ibn Adret was also very much aware that studying philosophy did not ipso facto indicate one's commitment to the ideas found therein, nor were private beliefs necessarily problematic so long as they remained private (MQp 16, pp. 54-55 / MQd 34, pp. 390-395). For further discussion, see Chapter 5.

What worried ban proponents of all stripes, ultimately, was not the denial of this or that essential principle, but the disintegration of the undefined but integral conceptual and authoritative framework, drawn from rabbinic sources, which undergirded medieval Jewish communal and private life. Ban proponents feared a deterioration of rabbinic authority in favor of the authority of human reason, concrete violation of halakhah, and thus, the decline of the authority of contemporary rabbis and attendant disorder in the functioning of the community. While they recommend certain theological positions as incumbent upon all Jews, their primary concern is not doctrinal so much as curricular, cultural, and pragmatic. Ideational transgression was a potent and imminent threat, best avoided by engagement with traditional texts and methodologies rather than creeds and systematic treatises on faith.

#### IDEATIONAL TRANSGRESSION ACCORDING TO THE BARCELONA BANS

The text of the ban against the underage study of philosophy, along with and the supporting documents that arrived with it, justify the necessity of a general ban and thereby provide some of the most direct and transparent information about how its proponents understood transgression rooted in ideas. For instance, the ban text itself states directly that studying philosophy causes confusion between perfect (revealed) and imperfect (reasoned) wisdom and thereby leads to the denial of God's omniscience:

How can a man not be afraid to judge between human wisdom, which builds upon analogy, demonstration, and imagination, and the wisdom of the Most High, to whom we bear no relation or similarity [in this regard]? Can a human being, who dwells within a material body, think of judging the God who created him, by saying—God forbid—“This is

possible, and that He cannot do”? This truly would bring one to complete denial (*kefirah*) [of God’s existence].<sup>2</sup>

Though brief, this is one of the clearest formulations of ideational transgression in the letters of *Minḥat Qena'ot* as denying God’s essence as omnipotent and perfect. Note, however, that taking upon oneself the power to discern truth—“to judge between human wisdom...and the wisdom of the Most High”—is not presented here as transgressive in and of itself, but as leading to transgression. What constitutes *kefirah* is not made explicit in the text of the ban, beyond the intimation that it is a denial of God’s essence, i.e., a failure of belief; what exactly this means in terms of an individual’s behavior is not discussed. Instead, delineating that will be the task of the statement presented in the third letter of the bundle. According to that subsequent, non-binding statement included along with the official ban, ideational transgression consists of allegoresis that obscures the reality of biblical narrative and thereby leads to nonobservance of the commandments, a situation that threatens the social norms of the entire Jewish community.<sup>3</sup>

The Barcelona ban proponents suggest that the actions of their opponents will lead to potentially widespread transgression which will prolong the suffering of exile. Recent events, they claim, represent a break from tradition and an actualization of the transgressive potential in external knowledge:

Because of our transgressions (*ḥata'einu*) we were exiled from our land; because our deed is strange (*zar*), we were dispersed to the far ends [of the earth] and scatted among the

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<sup>2</sup> MQd 99, pp. 723-724, ll. 19-23 [omitted from MQp; but see Bischles’s editorial note on p. 152].

<sup>3</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 152 / MQd 101, pp. 733-734, ll. 28-40.



nations.<sup>4</sup> However, we are bondsmen, and in our bondage our God has not forsaken us. He made us and we are His, and though we may have no repose among the nations, and they judge us at every moment, His testaments and laws shall comfort us day by day. Given our transgressions (*ḥata'enu*), He gave us up and sold us to our enemies, yet we sing the Lord's song upon the foreign (*nekhar*) soil.<sup>5</sup> This is our consolation in our affliction; in this way will He provide us relief from our work and the toil of our hands. Until now we have blessed God, since we have had his Torah to praise and to renown. Now, however, we have become angry and have no peace, upon hearing that there are people whose path takes them down to the earth unto the nethermost pit—people who have left God's Torah, who set their table with the books of the nations (*sifrei ha-goyim*), "Alvan" and "Manahat."<sup>6</sup>

By invoking the exile, the ban proponents suggest that the transgression of the individual affects the collective.<sup>7</sup> The sins for which the punishment of exile was levied upon Jews as a corporate entity are compounded by the ban opponents' errors:

Truly, these people have upon them the spirit of disorientation, and it is in that direction that they bear their hearts. They have truly despised the Lord, for they have denied the Torah of our God which He gave to Moses at Sinai. They have destroyed the entire nation because they increased the fierceness of [God's] fury, wrath and indignation, potentially causing Him to keep us in exile even longer.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The latter clause is constructed by allusion to Isaiah 28:21 (לַעֲשׂוֹת מַעֲשָׂהוּ זָר מִמַּעֲשָׂהוּ וְלַעֲבֹד עַבְדָּתוֹ נִכְרִיָּה) ("עַבְדָּתוֹ") and Ezekiel 25:15 ("וְהִפְצִיצוּ אֹתָךְ בְּגוֹיִם וְזָרִיתִיךָ בְּאַרְצוֹת"), but seems also to contain original wordplay that emphasizes causality: i.e., because our deed is strange (זָר), He scattered us (זָרָנוּ).

<sup>5</sup> Or, as per Ms. ב, which has "וְאִם חֲטֵאוֹנוּ" rather than "וְאִם חֲטֵאוֹנוּ", the line could be read "If we should sin (*ḥata'nu*), He will give us up and sell us to our enemies, until we sing the song of God upon the foreign soil." The manuscripts are divided between עַד and עוֹד in the phrase "עַד נִשְׁרָא אֶת שִׁיר ה'": see the apparatus to l. 20, MQd p. 733.

<sup>6</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 152 / MQd 101, pp. 733-734, ll. 16-24. These two biblical personages are Edomites mentioned in the genealogy of Esau, Genesis 36:23. That is, the author(s) of the letter are referring to the Christian nations of Europe. Cf. Ibn Adret's usage of Alvan and Manahat in a similar context in MQp 2, p. 22 / MQd 20, p. 277, l. 18; and also in the first Barcelona communal letter, MQp 20, p. 60 / MQd 38, p. 410, l. 21.

<sup>7</sup> The writers have not yet named the errors under discussion as transgressive—this comes only at the end of the passage, where anyone possessing a work of philosophy is deemed to be a *min*—but that is the implication.

<sup>8</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 153 / MQd 101, pp. 735-736, ll. 47-50.

In fact, the writers imply that the transgression that served as the initial impetus for the punishment of exile was taking on foreign practices, similar to the contemporary actions of the rationalists: “Because our deeds are strange, we were dispersed to the far ends [of the earth] and scattered among the nations.” This paraphrase is all the more unusual for its decontextualized meaning: in Isaiah, the strange deeds in question are God’s, threatened as punishment for Israel’s transgressions. In the Barcelona letter, it is *ma‘asim zarim* that instigated the exile and that will prolong it.

Second, the supporting documents for the ban proclaim a causal link between the type of allegoresis inspired by rationalism’s aggrandizement of human reason and the transgression of Jewish law. The ban opponents’ most egregious allegories are rehearsed: the patriarchs are figures of speech, Moses merely a wise philosopher, and the historical narratives of Genesis spiritually symbolic. Here allegoresis is explicitly connected with antinomian behavior:

They say that from “In the beginning” to the giving of the Torah, everything is a parable—Abraham and Sarah are Matter and Form, the twelve sons of Jacob are the twelve signs of the zodiac, the four kings who fought the five [in Genesis 14:1-2] are the four elements and the five senses [respectively]. We’ve heard that they decided to reach beyond that to comment on the *mizvot*, [claiming] that the Urim and Thummim are the instrument called the astrolabe; regarding *tefillin* and prayer, they made of them frivolity. Nor do they fear to speak against Moses, saying—God forbid [that it be so]—that he was a philosopher-king,<sup>9</sup> by claiming that the Torah is not from heaven, but merely ideas and decisions that Moses made. It got to the point that one of them said, preaching before many in the synagogue, that it is perplexing why Moses saw fit to prohibit pork. This could be a result of his [the preacher’s] wicked nature, but the fact is that wise men have not seen in him such a bad

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<sup>9</sup> In context, this seems to be the meaning of נִימוֹס (as in Bereshit Rabbah 65:20 and Megillah 12b), as pointed out by Dimitrovsky (p. 734, n. to l. 34).

character.<sup>10</sup> Another of them said that the commandment about *tefillin* does not mean that they should actually be laid upon the head and arm, because the intention [of this commandment] is simply for a person to comprehend and remember God. In other words, these [places on the body] are allusions: those [*tefillin*] laid on the head allude to the mind and those laid on the arm allude to the heart, which are the instruments of comprehension and memory [respectively], hinting that a person should comprehend and remember, and nothing other than that. From this point they “signal with a finger,”<sup>11</sup> extending a finger and speaking evilly of all the Torah’s commandments. They remove the yoke from themselves and have no part of their [the commandments’] literal meaning.<sup>12</sup> Each man and woman should do what is right in their view.<sup>13</sup>

These allegories lead people to stop observing the commandments, the Barcelonans argue; if the Torah is all parable, symbols, and theory, people will no longer wear *tefillin*, maintain *kashrut*, keep their sidelocks, or refrain from wearing cloth of linen mixed with wool. Ostensibly, the transgression of these laws stands in for a broader flouting of the halakhah that the ban proponents fear. From those violations they cite, it is clear that their concern focused on *ḥuqqim*, the category of commandments for which there is no apparent reason—an ancient categorization developed extensively in the medieval period.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising that ban proponents focused on the

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<sup>10</sup> That is, this man harbored transgressive ideas because he was convinced of them intellectually, not because of a congenitally wicked nature. Possibly, this line is a reference to Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim, who was in fact defended by “wise men”: see Chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> This is one of the adulteress’s seduction tactics, according to Sotah 9a. In other words, the author(s) are saying here that all these allegations against the rationalists are the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

<sup>12</sup> While “literal” is a reductionist translation of *לפניו*, it fits the meaning here: that such rationalists reject any implication of actual, performative obligation derived from scripture.

<sup>13</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 153 / MQd 101, pp. 734–735, ll. 28–42.

<sup>14</sup> The division between *mishpatim* and *ḥuqqim* is implicit in the biblical text itself, and elaborated in rabbinic literature; in the Middle Ages, it was developed by rationalists in particular—Se’adiah Ga’on, Judah ha-Levi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Maimonides. A related interest, determining *ta’amei ha-mizvot*, was also developed in the medieval period, especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, both by rationalists and, spurred by Bahye Ibn Paquda’s *Hovot ha-Levavot*, by the mystics of early Qabbalah and then Zoharic Qabbalah.

vulnerability, and importance, of the *ḥuqqim*.<sup>15</sup> The logical conclusion of their opponents' views was the violation of such irrational precepts, easily demolished by Aristotelian logic; yet hewing to them would indicate submission to that beyond human reason. Perhaps for this reason ban proponents cite Maimonides directly:

Who is more esteemed among us than the scholar, our rabbi, Moses [b. Maimon] of blessed memory, who wrote correctly in his book, and we quote,<sup>16</sup> "This is my view also concerning every transgression that results in a contradiction of the Torah or a disagreement about it [that it indicates a disbelief in God].<sup>17</sup> Even if a Jew merely eats meat with milk or wears *sha'atnez*, or rounds the hair of his head, out of conviction that is confirmed by him to have resulted from his disbelief in the truth of that law—he is in my view one of whom the Torah says that 'he has reviled (*megadef*) God.' He is liable to be put to death for denial (*kefirah*), not as punishment [for the transgressions themselves]. For this reason their property is burned and cannot be inherited,<sup>18</sup> as in the case of the others

<sup>15</sup> In writing his theological introduction to *Minḥat Qena'ot*, Abba-Mari addresses the challenge of the *ḥuqqim* directly: "Concerning that which they also say in the *haggadah*, why is its name pig (*ḥazir*)? Because in the future God, may He be blessed, will return it (*le-ḥaziro*) to us, for the impermissibility of eating of pig is counted among those matters whose purpose is not revealed, as they said, may they be blessed, in tractate Yoma [67b]: *ḥuqqim* are matters which the Adversary denounces and to which the nations of the world respond, such as the wearing of *sha'atnez*, the eating of pork, and so on. Thus they said that in the future that is yet to come, God, may he be blessed, shall reveal to us the purpose of His prohibition [of pork] along with the rest of the purpose of the Torah, and this is the return (*ba-ḥazarah*) which is hinted at in the Midrash" (MQp Ch. 2, p. 6 / MQd 2, p. 232, ll. 21-27). The 'aggadic material cited by Abba-Mari is supposedly found in Vayiqra' Rabbah 13:5 (Dimitrovsky, p. 232, n. to l. 22), but is a textually problematic passage: see Joseph Heinemann, "פרשיות בויקרא רבה שמקוריותן מופקפקת," *Tarbiz* 37 (1978): 339-345.

<sup>16</sup> This citation is a verbatim extract from the Ibn Tibbon translation of the *Moreh*, 3:41, from the portion of the work dealing with *ta'amei ha-mizvot* (3:25-50). MQp and several of the manuscripts have minor variants that render the citation approximate, the most important of which is the addition of the phrase *סיף וסיף* to the clause "ויהרג מיתת כפירה" in Mss. ג and ד (see Dimitrovsky's apparatus to l. 58 on MQd, p. 736) and MQp (p. 153).

<sup>17</sup> The extract cited in the letter omits the referent of the first cited sentence, which in the text of the *Moreh* is the previous sentence: "A person has not worshipped a star at all unless he believes in its eternity" (Original: "לא יעבד קט כוכבא אלא מן אעתקד פיה אלקדם"; Ibn Tibbon's version: "כי לא עבד אדם כוכב כלל אלא מי שהאמין בו הקדמות"; and cf. Shlomo Pines's translation from the Arabic, "For a star cannot ever be worshipped except by one who believes that it is eternal a parte ante," in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 2:565).

<sup>18</sup> A reference to the fate of those found to be living in an *'ir nidaḥat*, a city in the Land of Israel that communally reverted to idolatry whose inhabitants, according to Deuteronomy 13:13-19, must all be put to

sentenced to death by a court of law.” ...Such transgressors of the soul, all Jews are obligated to ban and excommunicate.<sup>19</sup>

Here proponents are, pointedly, using Maimonides’ authority to bolster their own point of view, which is in actuality contrary to the spirit of Maimonides’ project of harmonizing the multifarious Jewish tradition with Aristotelianism precision. In this statement from the Barcelona proponents of the ban, the causal relationship between allegoresis and transgression of halakhah, suggested elsewhere, is made explicit.

Finally, the passage labels their opponents’ transgression as ideational and recommends the rabbinic penalty for such transgressors, excommunication and death:

This transgression will never be atoned for until they die, until the fires of *Gebinnom* have consumed them, and the bodies of those in a divine fire (*’esh lo’ nupah*),<sup>20</sup> a fire that never goes out (*’esh lo’ tikbbah natun*).<sup>21</sup> Presently, we are in agreement, and by the decree and utterance of angels, do ban the wrongdoers who become involved in such things, even just one such thing. Moreover we excommunicate them with the authority of the heavenly court and the earthly court of law. May they descend lower and lower until they repent completely, and never again return to ignorance or to failing to give praise to the Torah and to the sages of the Talmud, of blessed memory. The books which such a person has written, we judge anyone who owns them to be an ideational transgressor (*min*), and the books to be books of sorcery (*sifrei kosmin*).<sup>22</sup>

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death, after which the city is completely destroyed. (However, see the rabbinic procedure for judging a city to be an *’ir nidaḥat*, which renders the concept theoretical: Sanhedrin 2a, 111b, 112b; Temurah 8a; and cf. Maimonides’ analysis in *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer ha-Madda*: *Hilkhot ’Avodah Zarah* chapter 4, and his comment in 5:2.)

<sup>19</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 153 / MQd 101, pp. 736-737, ll. 54-59, 68-69.

<sup>20</sup> I.e., the fire of divine retribution, as described in Job 20:26.

<sup>21</sup> This is the eternal fire in *Gebinnom* decreed for “the *minin*...and the *’epiqorsin* who denied (*kafu*) the Torah and denied the resurrection of the dead and interpreted publicly...who transgressed (*hat’u*) and caused many to sin (*heḥti’u ’et ha-rabim*)” in Rosh ha-Shanah 17a. On *Gebinnom* and the other rabbinic terms, see below.

<sup>22</sup> MQp 81(a), pp. 153 / MQd 101, pp. 737, ll. 69-76.

Here, in contrast to the actual Barcelona ban included with it in the packet of letters sent to Montpellier, these recommendations are symbolic rather than actual. In the absence of a Sanhedrin, death penalties could not be enforced; the ornamental formula used here merely invokes the Sanhedrin's authority. Excommunication (*niddui*, *herem*) could be and was actualized not infrequently in the Middle Ages—this was, after all, the Barcelona ban's proposed penalty for those possessing books of non-Jewish philosophy, and was levied by ban opponents, too, against those prohibiting the study of philosophy—but here it is not. When the Barcelona aristocrats announce, using the ancient formula, “we excommunicate them with the authority of the heavenly court and the earthly court of law,” they do not mean for this to be executed. It is a spiritual judgment, not a civil matter, conferring status rather than actionable punishment: “The books which such a person has written, we judge anyone who owns them to be an ideational transgressor (*min*), and the books to be books of sorcery (*sifrei kosmin*).” The punishment decreed by this document is of the divine variety: “This transgression will never be atoned for until they die, until the fires of *Gehinnom* have consumed them...May they descend lower and lower until they repent completely, and never again return to ignorance.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, no parameters are given for those unfortunate souls requiring separation from the community, a marked difference from the careful, brief, and precise language of the ban itself (contained in the first letter of the bundle).<sup>24</sup> The use of rabbinic precepts in this passage indicates the severity of the charges, rather than an active decree of

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<sup>23</sup> MQp 81(a), p.153 / MQd 101, pp. 737, ll. 69-71.

<sup>24</sup> MQd 99, pp. 723-724, ll. 10-21 [omitted in MQp].

excommunication. Ideational transgression here is a grave spiritual offense that denies the truth of reveled scripture and leads a person to active transgression.

#### THE IMPACT OF RABBINIC PRINCIPLES

As evident from the language of the ban and its supporting materials, the fourteenth-century debate was shaped by the rabbinic worldview that served as the substrate of all medieval Jewish discourse, meaning that the views of ban proponents were expressed in non-systematic terms: they adopted the rabbinic view that boundaries of belief and action exist, beyond which one transgresses, without articulating the conceptual framework which defines those transgressions. Specifically, the talmudic concepts of *minut*, *kefirah*, and *'epiqorsut*, among others, are used by Abba-Mari, Ibn Adret, and their supporters to denote the concept of ideational transgressive in their own time. Their concept of the transgressive was not only framed in rabbinic terms but also by rabbinic concerns about foreign influence, denial of rabbinic interpretive authority, and sectarianism dating from late antiquity. More fundamentally, it was shaped by rabbinic reticence on matters of theology, despite the theoretical framework implicit in rabbinic literature.<sup>25</sup> Solomon Schechter cautions that the integrity of the rabbinic worldview must be respected in any discussion of it:

Any attempt at an orderly and complete set of Rabbinic theology is an impossible task; for not only are our materials scanty and insufficient for such a purpose, but, when handling

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<sup>25</sup> A comparable theoretical framework, the existence of which is logically necessary but unarticulated, is suggested by E. P. Sanders, who postulates that a “Covenantal Nomism” underpinned Judaism in the Second Temple period. See his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) and, more recently, “Covenantal Nomism Revisited,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2009): 23–55.

those fragments which have come down us, we must always be careful not to labour them too much, or to 'fill them with meaning' which their author could never have intended them to bear, against which all his other teachings and his whole life form one long, emphatic protest, or to spin from the harmless repetition by a Rabbi of a gnostic saying or some Alexandrinic theorem the importance of which he never understood, a regular system of Rabbinic theology.<sup>26</sup>

We must be similarly cautious in coaxing a conceptualization of ideational transgression out of the words of Abba-Mari and Ibn Adret, who, following the talmudic rabbis, assumed no need for formal definitions or parameters in their discussion of the matter.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the medieval ban proponents left the rabbinic terms almost entirely undeveloped, so that an accusation of *minut* levied against a fourteenth-century rationalist had little more conceptual or legal meaning than it did in its original rabbinic context.

While rabbinic literature does not include a systematic exposition of transgression rooted in belief, it clearly recognizes transgressive modes of thought and behavior which place one out-of-bounds. This boundary is often expressed as denial of a place among the Jewish people or in the world-to-come,<sup>28</sup> or by the related concepts of punishment in *Gehinnom* and ineligibility for bodily

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<sup>26</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1909), 16.

<sup>27</sup> On the development of the theoretical basis of authority of human interpretive activity of scripture, see Avi Sagi, "Halakhic Praxis and the Word of God: A Study of Two Models," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 305-329.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the well-known adage, "Every Jew has a place in the world-to-come" (Sanhedrin 10:1), this concept is used in the discussion of specific transgressions, e.g., "R. Ḥisda also said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba, 'Four classes will not appear before the presence of the Shekhinah: the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of hypocrites, and the class of slanderers'" (אמר רב חסדא אמר רבי ירמיה בר אבא 'ארבע כיתות אין מקבלות פני שכינה כה לצים כה שקרנים כה חניפים כה מספרי לשון הרע; Sanhedrin 103a), and cf. Bereshit Rabbah 1:1, 10.



resurrection.<sup>29</sup> Rabbinic thought also loosely categorizes transgressors, which include sectarians and other who break away from the collective (*minim*); violators of Jewish law, either out of conscious choice, misguided belief, or weakness of character (the *kofer* and *'epiqoros*, or less commonly, the *poreq 'ol*, *mumar le-hakh'is*, or *mumar le-te'avon*);<sup>30</sup> apostates who convert out of conscious acceptance (*mumarim*, though the aforementioned *mumar le-hakh'is* and his counterpart the *mumar le-te'avon* need not be apostates); and converts who accept other faiths, perhaps under duress (*meshumadim*).<sup>31</sup> None of these is sufficiently clear or categorical as to constitute technical terms corresponding to a distinct halakhic status (in contradistinction to, e.g., *mamzer* or *kohen*); so too with generic rabbinic terminology for transgression such as *'averah* or *ḥet'*, culled from the

<sup>29</sup> *Gebinnom* (גִּבְיִן הַנֶּחֱמָ, גִּבְיִן הַנֶּחֱמָ, גִּבְיִן הַנֶּחֱמָ) is mentioned in Joshua 15:8 and 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; and Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5–6, and 32:35, apparently in reference to a particular geographical location where cultic physical torments were actually perpetrated. *Gebinnom* was developed in rabbinic thought into an appellation for punishment of the soul after death (Shabbat 152b–153a; Rosh ha-Shannah 17a; Bava' Mezi'ah 58b; Nedarim 8b; 'Avodah Zarah 3b; Tosefta Rosh ha-Shannah 16b ; and Tanḥuma Va-Yiqra' 8). Already in biblical literature *She'ol* is presented as a netherworld, though indistinctly (Numbers 16:33; Isaiah 38:18; Psalms 6:6 and 139:8; and Job 26:6). This concept was less developed in the rabbinic period. The resurrection of the dead is extensively developed in rabbinic thought (Sanhedrin 90b–91a), based on Daniel 12:2 (and also Isaiah 26:19 and Ezekiel 37:1 ff.). On the development of ideas of the afterlife, see Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, I–II (London: Oxford University Press, 1926); Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., translated by D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962); and A. Marmorstein, "The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead in Rabbinic Theology," in *Studies in Jewish Theology*, edited by J. Rabbinowitz and M. S. Lew (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

<sup>30</sup> On *periqat 'ol*, "removing the yoke," i.e., denying the obligation to observe the Torah's commandments, see the statements Sanhedrin 111b, Shevu'ot 13a, and Keritot 7a; Yerushalmi Peah 16b and Sanhedrin 27c; and Sifrei 31a–31b and 93a. Schechter discusses *periqat 'ol* as a type of rebellion in *Aspects*, 220–221. As he notes, the *poreq 'ol* may also be a garden-variety idolater, as in Sifrei 31b.

<sup>31</sup> In the medieval period, *meshumadim* would come to have the significance of forced conversion; Maimonides used the term in this way in the *Epistle to Yemen* and elsewhere. However, *meshumad* could also indicate a generic apostate, as in the medieval form of *Birkat ha-Minim*, on which see below. Not included among this list of terms are idolaters and atheists, who usually remain in a separate category from *minim*, though they may be considered *koferim* who, along with polytheists, Christians, Muslims, nonobservers of Jewish law, and incorrect observers of Jewish law, are deniers of the root principles (*'iqqarim*) of Judaism, also discussed below.

twenty-odd terms that appear in the biblical corpus in reference to aberrant behavior.<sup>32</sup> In fact, each of the terms mentioned above may be used more expansively in rabbinic literature, with much overlap, often occurring interchangeably or with only slight shades of differentiation within the same pericope.<sup>33</sup> This is the manner in which the terms are used in the *Minḥat Qena'ot*, as well.

The most commonly used term to denote an ideological transgressor in *Minḥat Qena'ot* is *min*, a word choice which reflects the prevalence of the term in rabbinic literature. A typical usage

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<sup>32</sup> The three most common biblical terms are חטא, פשע, and עון, while the preferred rabbinic term is עברה. On the biblical terms, see Rolf Knierim, *Hauptbegriffe fuer Suende im Alten Testament* (Guetersloh, 1965). The rabbinic discussion of sin concentrates on specific acts or categories of acts (e.g., positive or negative precepts), as in the thirty-six specific acts for which one incurs the penalty of *karet* (enumerated in Keritot 1:1). However, Schechter argues for a theoretical framework underlying the rabbinic discussion of sin: “It is clear that sin is conceived as an act of rebellion, denying the root that is the existence of God, or his providence, or his authority, indeed, excluding him from the world. This extends also, as we have seen, to a sinful thought, in fact from the moment that a man thinks of sin it is as much as if he would commit treason against God” (*Aspects*, 233, and see more broadly Chapter 14, “Sin as Rebellion,” 219–241). Ephraim Urbach essentially disagrees, viewing rabbinic discussion of sin as an element of its conceptualization of death, punishment, and repentance, but not an independently developed area of the rabbinic worldview: see *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter 15, “Man’s Accounting and the World’s Accounting,” especially 420–436. The division of *‘averot* into light (קלות) and severe (חמורות) is in Yoma 8:8–9, with commentary in Yoma’ 85b–87b (with parallels in Midrash).

<sup>33</sup> Ancillary to the rabbinic discussion of ideational transgression are the concepts of *huqqot ha-goyim* (following foreign customs); *darkhei ha-Emori* (following the customs of idolators); sorcerers (*mekhashfim*); and idolaters (*aku”m*, those practicing *‘avodah zarah* and perhaps also *kishuf*), who otherwise inhabit a halakhic category of their own. All of these terms are mentioned in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters; a good example is Abba-Mari’s lengthy, early letter to Ibn Adret, MQp 5, pp. 30–37 / MQd 23, pp. 311–333. In addition, Menaḥem ha-Me’iri, Abba-Mari’s esteemed contemporary and neighbor, is known for his writing on the subject of the idolator. Specifically, ha-Meiri is known for his attempt to recategorize the idolator as a morally-degenerate, crude polytheist distinct from those who recognize the One God, no matter how transgressive or incorrect the form of their belief. See Gerald J. Blidstein, “Menahem Meiri’s Attitude Toward Gentiles: Apologetics or Worldview?” In *Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages*, edited by Joseph Dan, 119–134 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994); Jacob Katz, “Religious Tolerance in the Halakhic and Philosophical System of Rabbi Menaḥem ha-Meiri,” [Hebrew], *Zion* 18 (1953): 15–30; and Ephraim E. Urbach, “Rabbi Menaḥem ha-Meiri’s Theory of Tolerance: Its Origins and Limits” [Hebrew], in *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, edited by E. Etkes and Y. Salmon, 34–44 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980).

is seen in the statement of Isaac b. Moses b. Judah, Abba-Mari's young protégé, who writes to Barcelona, "It is my understanding that when you mentioned in your letter he who 'marries the daughter of a foreign god' and 'clasps the bosom of a foreign woman,' you were referring to those who deal in transgressive matters (*divrei minut*) and falsely interpret *haggadot*, spreading sophistry."<sup>34</sup> Here Isaac connects foreignness with transgression, building upon the broadest rabbinic usage, in which *minut* functions as a catch-all term for those who snub rabbinic authority, both actual and theoretical.<sup>35</sup> An egregious transgressor may be described as a *min*: one who

<sup>34</sup> MQp 25, p. 70 / MQd 44, p. 444, ll. 50-51, with reference to MQp 20, p. 60 / MQd 38, p. 409, l. 15.

<sup>35</sup> The multiple significance of the term *min* throughout the ancient and medieval periods is demonstrated by the complex textual history of Birkat ha-Minim and the 'Aleinu prayer, as well as the talmudic discussion of the category of books known as *sifrei ha-minim*. In Birkat ha-Minim in particular, changes to the opening clause have ranged from למושמדים, "to the apostates"; למלשינים, "to the informers"; המינים והנוצרים, "the sectarians and the Christians"; למינים ולזרים ולכופרים ולרשעים, "the sectarians and foreigners and deniers and the wicked"; and לפושעים, "to the wicked ones." While censorship and other concerns impacted these liturgical changes, they demonstrate a linking of the various concepts with the term *min*. See Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. and ed. by Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 45-46; Israel Levi, ed., "Fragments de rituel de priers," *Revue des études juives* 53 (1907): 238; and Louis Finkelstein, "The Development of the Amidah" [Part 1 of 2], *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 16, no. 1 (1925): 22-23. Finkelstein points out that anti-sectarian sentiments, in particular those relating to the schism between the *zeduqim* and *perushim*, are to be found in *Birkat ha-Minim* and elsewhere in the 'Amidah, in the *Zadiqim* and *Gevurot* benedictions; he calls these three sections the "anti-heretical benedictions." On the adoption of 'Aleinu into the Rosh ha-Shannah and then daily liturgy, see Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns*, translated by Richard S. Sarason (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1977), 270-275 and Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 71-72. Tosefta Shabbat 13:5 and Tosefta Yadayim 2:13 discuss the category of books known as *sifrei ha-minim* which, along with *gilyonim*, need not be saved from a fire on Shabbat even if they contain the tetragrammaton (whereas on a weekday, these may be left to burn after the tetragrammaton is cut out), and which "do not render the hands ritually unclean," along with those texts eventually to be known as the Apocrypha. See Raphael Rabinovitch, דקדוקי סופרים (Munich: H. Roesel, 1867; reprint, Jerusalem: 'Or ha-Hokhmah, 2002), 260, n. 6 and Timothy H. Lim, "The Defilement of the Hands as a Principle Determining the Holiness of Scriptures," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 2 (October 1, 2010): 501-515. Most scholars understand the *minim* to whom *sifrei minim* are ascribed to be either Gnostics or Christians (Urbach, *The Sages*, 26). Others suggest different readings; Saul Lieberman suggests the variant *sefer hamiras*, "Homeric literature" (*Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1964], 105-114), while Mordecai Margaliot maintains that such *sifrei minim* are to be classed with *sifrei kosmim*, impermissible magical texts (*Sepher ha-*

worships idols, believes God to be multiplicitous, flagrantly eats forbidden fat, or belittles 'aggadah.<sup>36</sup> Or, more generically, a *min* may simply be a denier of essential tenets, especially those of interest to maintaining the authority of rabbinic interpretation, such as denial of bodily resurrection and the divine origin of the Torah.<sup>37</sup> In addition to similar, frequent accusations of *minut* against ban opponents, proponents refer to them as Sadducees, appropriating this once-contextual term to mean “one who interprets scripture incorrectly.” For instance, Abba-Mari reports that the slander against Samuel ha-Sulami included the metaphorical accusation that “after serving in the high priesthood, he became a Sadducee.”<sup>38</sup> In his letter of support for the ban, Samuel b. Judah Lunel writes of the ban opponents, “They have exceeded the Sadducees in sin (*yosifu la-ḥeto' mi-ha-ẓeduqim*), for they [the Sadducees] at least hold to the commandments and laws of the written Torah.”<sup>39</sup> Jacob b. Makhir uses the same term to lampoon the ban proposal, suggesting that if one is to become a Sadducee by reading philosophy, then it does not matter whether he does so while young or old.<sup>40</sup> *Min* may thus be confined by the fourteenth-century writers to the narrow meaning of “sectarian” which appears in rabbinic literature;<sup>41</sup> or *min* may

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*Razim: A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic period, Collected from Genizah Fragments and Other Sources* [Jerusalem: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966], 23-28).

<sup>36</sup> For the polytheist, see Sanhedrin 38b; for the idol-worshiper and transgressor of *kasbrut*, see Horayot 11a; for the 'aggadah-denier, see Gittin 57a and Bava' Batra' 75a.

<sup>37</sup> Sanhedrin 99a-99b.

<sup>38</sup> MQp 12, p. 46 / MQd 30, p. 365, l. 6.

<sup>39</sup> MQp 95, p. 175 / MQd 115, p. 817, ll. 32-33.

<sup>40</sup> MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, pp. 507-508, l. 19-24.

<sup>41</sup> Also, less commonly, non-Jews, who by definition cannot be sectarians, are also described as *minim* in the Talmud: Deuteronomy 14:1, *לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ, וְלֹא תִשְׁיִמוּ קֶרֶחַ בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לְמַת*, is interpreted in the rabbinic

acquire a semantic breadth somewhat analogous to the Greco-Latin term anglicized as “heretic”—that is, befitting the Greek term αἵρεσις, “division,” “faction,” “sect,” as applied by Josephus to the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to *minut*, the *Minḥat Qena'ot* writers often refer to ideational transgression by the term *kefirah*, “denial,” or the ideational basis that underlies all transgression. “All the more so [is one endangered] who studied the compositions of those who are not men of the Torah, for he will be cast into one of the pits, and those who deny (*koferim*) createdness [of the universe] and miracles [will be cast into] the depths of *She'ol*,” Ibn Adret writes, connected *kefirah* with the belief in an eternal universe and a natural order precluding the supernatural.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Bonafos Vidal provides a number of problematic positions which he designates *kefirah*, including transgressing *kashrut*, failing to wear *zizit* or to observe *shemittah*, or denying the literal falling of the manna and the parting of the Sea of Reeds.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Bonafos underscores the ideational nature of *kefirah*, which results from denying the *‘iqqarim* that underlie *ḥuqqim*, and is tantamount to claiming “that the Torah is not divine (*‘ein Torah min ha-shamayim*).” Indeed, in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, the root *k-p-r*

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tradition as “לא תעשו אגודות אגודות” on the basis of Amos 11:6, וְאֶגְדֹּתַי עַל-אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּה (Sifrei Deuteronomy 96). *Minim* cum sectarians in the rabbinic context would of course include Sadducees (*zedoqim*), as well as Samaritans (*kutim* in Talmudic idiom), early Christians (the generic *minim*), and, later, Karaites (*qara'im*). For instance, this is the term used by Samuel ha-Nagid when he boasted that no Karaites lived in Iberia, apart from a few border villages; reported in Judah b. Barzillai al-Bargeloni’s *Sefer ha-‘Ittim*, ed. J. Schorr (Kraków, 1903), 267; see also Marina Rustow, “Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Case Studies of Jewish Heresy,” *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 42, n. 13. Less commonly, non-Jews, who by definition cannot be sectarians, are also described as *minim* in the Talmud: for example, in *Hullin* 13b, a person who is unambiguously a Roman is described as such. Sectarianism of any sort is itself associated with two grave transgressions, of the prohibitions *l’o titgodedu* and against *perishah mi-darkhei ha-zibbur* (though these transgressions are not the sole province of sectarians).

<sup>42</sup> *Antiquities* 13.5.9 and 18.1.2; *Bellum Judaicum* 2.8.2.

<sup>43</sup> MQd 52.2, p. 482, ll. 196–198 [Absent in MQp].

<sup>44</sup> MQp 11, p. 46 / MQd 29, pp. 363–364, ll. 13–22. He writes, “I have a mighty rod, a lordly staff for when I travel from the wells of living waters to *kefirah*.” For further discussion of this passage, see below.

often appears as a verb, emphasizing the act of denial inherent in its rabbinic usage. The Tosefta makes this point overtly: “A person has not denied [God] until he denies the root principle, and he has not committed a transgression until he denies Him who created him.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, concrete transgression is not possible until one has internally denied God.<sup>46</sup> Commonly in rabbinic literature, and echoed in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, the term *kofer* is often used in conjunction with the concept of *iqqar*, “root,” a loan-word from Aramaic which, as Ephraim Urbach observes, should be understood as “the primary principle of the faith,” namely, the belief in one, unitary God.<sup>47</sup>

However, this is not principled, philosophical denial so much as rebellion and estrangement:

The *kōfēr-bā'Iqqār* is seen as the most extreme example of a man's estrangement from the world of the Torah and commandments, but this self-alienation is intrinsic testimony to the denial of God, without it being linked to any speculative declaration whatsoever. This conception is widely current among the Tannaim in the middle of the second century.<sup>48</sup>

In this way rabbinic thought ties belief to action, conceiving the *kofer* as one whose beliefs and actions are necessarily aligned and fundamentally inseparable. It is likely that ban proponents assumed this causal relationship in their usage of *kefirah* as an accusation against their opponents.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Tosefta Shevu'ot 3:5.

<sup>46</sup> On the significance of the parallel phrases כופר במי שבראו and כופר בעיקר used in this passage, see Urbach, *The Sages*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Urbach, *The Sages*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Urbach, *The Sages*, 26-27.

<sup>49</sup> Ban proponents also used the term generically, as in the letter from the Montpellier proponents which laments, “Our hands are empty of rod or lash, or even [the ability] to call them out by name, [but] the houses of deniers (*batei koferim*) will be torn down” (MQp 23, p. 65 / MQd 41/42, p. 428, l. 36; the last clause is a citation of Proverbs 15:25, suggesting a textual emendation that would make the syntax more natural; see Dimitrovsky's note on p. 428 to l. 36, s.v. "בתי").



Another rabbinic term borrowed by the *Minḥat Qena'ot* authors to refer to the ideological transgressor is *'epiqoros*. Though occurring less commonly than *min* or *kofer* in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters, this term is used in the sense of individual, ideological dissent, as in the dialogue between Crescas Vidal and Ibn Adret about the appropriateness of studying philosophy in order to refute the *'epiqoros*. Crescas defends Samuel ha-Sulami for taking in Levi b. Abraham, arguing that “his intention was to respond to the *'epiqoros* according to their ways.”<sup>50</sup> While Crescas intimates that Levi is an *'epiqoros*, he wishes to exonerate ha-Sulami by noting that his specific intent was to bring Levi back to the fold by directly addressing his points, as dictated in 'Avot 2:14, “know what to reply to the *'epiqoros*.” Ibn Adret dismisses Crescas' point, however, saying, “Although you say that his [ha-Sulami's] intention is nothing other than to study that which he can respond to the foreign *'epiqoros* who speaks against our Torah, were he to study with such a person, he will be neither for us nor for our enemies.”<sup>51</sup> The choice of the term here clearly reflects the context of 'Avot, and assumes that the *'epiqoros* is a person who is intellectually convinced of ideas contrary to the Torah, in accordance with rabbinic usage. Almost certainly a Hebraization of “Epicurean,”<sup>52</sup> *'epiqoros* was later connected by Maimonides with the root *p-q-r*, “to be free of restraint.”<sup>53</sup> In the

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<sup>50</sup> MQp 12, p. 47 / MQd 30, p. 368, ll. 50-51.

<sup>51</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, pp. 380-381, ll. 86-91. Ibn Adret also rejects philosophical study for this purpose in his letter to Jacob b. Makhir; see MQp 40, p. 87 / MQd 59, p. 516, ll. 26-28.

<sup>52</sup> I.e., *Ἐπικυρήσις*. Josephus uses this term in reference to Jews who deny divine providence and God's knowledge of particulars, in the context of discussing interpretations of the book of Daniel (*Antiquitates Judaicae*, 10.11.7).

<sup>53</sup> *Commentary on the Mishnah (Sirāj)* to Sanhedrin 10:1 (in *Pereq Heleq*), with reference to the discussion in Sanhedrin 38b (which occurs *prior* to the Gemara for Sanhedrin 10:1, the latter being on 90a).

Mishnah's statement, "The following have no place in the world-to-come: he who says there is no resurrection of the dead, and that the Torah is not from heaven, and an *'epiqoros*," the term seems to be conflated with the denial of essential principles (again, bodily resurrection, the divine origin of scripture).<sup>54</sup> An *'epiqoros* would therefore be a heretic of conscience, philosophically opposed to certain ideas central to the rabbinic worldview.<sup>55</sup> An additional valence of *'epiqoros* is one who flagrantly disrespects the Torah and rabbinic scholars.<sup>56</sup> The term *'epiqoros* demonstrates that rabbinic tradition recognizes the possibility of individual dissent on the basis of reason or belief, and as such was a term adaptable to the polemical ends of ban proponents.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the figure of Elisha b. 'Avuyah, the prototype rabbinic "heretic," informs the conceptualization of ideational transgression for the fourteenth-century writers. For the purpose of Maimonides, Abba-Mari, and the other medievals for whom he served as a stock figure, the

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<sup>54</sup> Sanhedrin 10:1.

<sup>55</sup> In Qiddushim 66a *'epiqoros* is used in reference to the Sadducees, i.e., to mean "sectarian," demonstrating that the term need not necessarily denote such skeptical objector.

<sup>56</sup> Sanhedrin 99b.

<sup>57</sup> An interesting point about the term *'epiqoros* emerges from its use by early modern censors. Around 1600, the convert to Christianity Domenico Gerosolimitano (Samuel Vivas, Bibas, c. 1552–c. 1621), in his work on the censorship of Hebrew books titled *Sefer ha-Ziqquq (Index Expurgatorius)*, singled out the term *min* as offensive to Christianity; other censors, however, merely replaced it with *'epiqoros*: see Amnon Raz-Krakozkin, "From Safed to Venice: The *Shulḥan 'Arukh* and the Censor," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, edited by H. Kreisel and C. Goodblatt, 91–115 (Be'er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 105. Here *min* is expressive of a particular kind of transgression, belief in the Christian Trinitarian God, rather than sectarianism in general. Its replacement, *'epiqoros*, intentionally points to internal Jewish transgression as opposed to outwards, to breakaway groups.



historical Elisha is far less significant than the literary Elisha.<sup>58</sup> On the simplest level, Elisha b.

ʾAvuyah emerges as a rabbi of stature in the later tannaitic period who became an outsider due to his non-normative beliefs.<sup>59</sup> The *locus classicus* of the explanation of Elisha b. ʾAvuyah's "heresy"—and therefore for ideational transgression in its rabbinic conception—is the story of the four who entered the orchard (*pardes*), found in several sources and redacted, apparently late, in Ḥagigah

14b.<sup>60</sup> There, Elisha is implicated in several common euphemisms for potential transgressors in

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<sup>58</sup> The textual history of the relatively many surviving statements about Elisha is complex, making it difficult and misleading to create a single narrative about this composite figure, who is almost certainly a fictional character in a didactic narrative crafted throughout the rabbinic and early medieval periods. The construction of the literary Elisha requires the conflation of several figures who may or may not be the same person. Elisha being an uncommon name, in several places an Elisha who appears to have the characteristics of Elisha b. ʾAvuyah, the brilliant but fallen sage, is assumed to be that man. For a critical reading of the clues about the historical ʾElisha b. Avuyah, see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha Ben Abuya and Eleazar Ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), especially 1-36, 191-232, 267-276; and Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Elisha ben Abuya: Torah and the Sinful Sage," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998): 141-122, expanded in *idem.*, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 64-104 (ch. 3). On the literary development of rabbinic figures within rabbinic literature, see Yonah Fraenkel, "Hermeneutic Problems in the Study of Aggadic Narrative" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 139-172; William Scott Green, "What's in a Name? The Problematic of a Rabbinic 'Biography,'" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice*, edited by *idem.*, 77-96 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978); and Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), especially 209-301.

<sup>59</sup> Whether these beliefs were of a mystical, Gnostic, or philosophical variety is not clear in the primary literature, nor is it clear whether Elisha was regarded as an apostate or as a heretic after he adopted these beliefs.

<sup>60</sup> This passage occurs in a pericope extending from Hagigah 14b through 15b, with parallels in Yerushalmi, Ḥagigah 2:1 (77b), Tosefta Ḥagigah 2:1-7 and in the *Heikhalot* corpus. See Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 232 for a structural outline of the *pardes* story of this version. Alon Goshen-Gottstein reconstructs its earliest version from variant readings of Tosefta Ḥagigah: "Four entered the orchard. One gazed and perished, one gazed and was smitten, one gazed and cut the shoots, and one went up and came down whole. Ben Azzai gazed and perished. Concerning him scripture says, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints' (Ps 116:15). Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten. Concerning him scripture says, 'If you found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it' (Prov 25:16). Elisha gazed and cut the shoots. Concerning him scripture says, 'Let not your mouth lead your flesh into sin' (Eccl 5:5). R. Akiva went up whole and came down whole. Concerning him scripture says, 'Draw me after you, let us make haste'" (Cant 1:4): in "Four Entered Paradise Revisited," *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995):

matters of belief: the notion of “entering the orchard,” a mystical parable in which the orchard represents esoteric knowledge that not everyone is prepared to receive; and the locution “to destroy the shoots,” interpreted as leading the susceptible astray. In other versions of the story, Elisha is called by the epithet *’Aḥer*, signaling the otherness which marks the transgressive: not only was Elisha wrong, he was qualitatively different and alien.<sup>61</sup> Also within this pericope, Elisha is associated with the concept of “eating the pomegranate and throwing away the rind,” or the ability to take what is good from wisdom outside of the Jewish tradition and remaining untouched by what is useless to Judaism. Specifically, Rabbi Meir, Elisha’s student, was able to study with him because of his ability to “throw away the rind,” the implication being that Elisha was unable to do so, and so became a transgressor.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Elisha is singled out as being unable to repent or to face divine judgment, consigned to death without the possibility of life in the world-to-come.<sup>63</sup>

The phrases and concepts that emerge from the story of Elisha are used throughout the *Minḥat Qena'ot* correspondence to discuss ideational transgression. Most discussions concentrate on the possibility of utilizing philosophically inappropriate materials without crossing the line to

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76-77 [terms in Hebrew characters omitted]. On Goshen-Gottstein’s rationale for the reconstruction, see his remarks on p. 76, n. 19 and p. 90, n. 53. For the differences among versions, see David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010); *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York: Schocken, 1946], 52-53; Ephraim E. Urbach, *המסורות על תורת הסוד בתקופת*, “*המסורות על תורת הסוד בתקופת*,” *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom Scholem*, edited by R. J. Zvi Werblowsky and Chaim Wirszubski, 1-27 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967, 12-13).

<sup>61</sup> Elisha b. ’Avuyah is also *assumed* to be the person referred to by the epithet *’Aḥer*, “Other” (or “Different One”). However, only one textual variant, preserved in manuscript, has the name Elisha where all other versions have *’Aḥer*. It is nowhere explicitly stated that Elisha b. ’Avuyah was known as *’Aḥer* after he became a heretic (or apostate). See Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner*, 62 and Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Hagigah 15b.

<sup>63</sup> Hagigah 15b.

ideational transgression, rather than focusing on the implication that the ideational transgressor is irredeemably other. For instance, Abba-Mari reports that Ibn Adret's judgment is that one who uses medical *segullot* is like "the case of Rabbi Meir, who finds a pomegranate and eats its fruit, and so on."<sup>64</sup> Ibn Adret writes to Shelemiah de Lunel that he is not opposed to the study of philosophy later in life, when one is full of Torah and will merely "eat the tasty morsels of foreign wisdom and throw away the rind."<sup>65</sup> The Montpellier ban opponents write, "If the refuse is great within them [books of philosophy], we shall take the nourishment and leave the garbage behind, learning from them as Rabbi Meir did from 'Aḥer."<sup>66</sup> Ha-Me'iri argues, "If, on one or two occasions, an individual should err in his thinking...why should wisdom be put to death? Were the gates of the orchard (*pardes*) locked when Elisha b. 'Avuyah came out?"<sup>67</sup> In this way, the story of Elisha furnishes the *Minḥat Qena'ot* writers with literary euphemisms indicating ideational transgression.

Not infrequently, ban proponents refer to rabbinic spiritual penalties for fundamental wrongs, including *karet*, a divinely-ordained death sentence traditionally understood to consist of premature death, and tenancy in the rabbinic netherworld expressed as *She'ol* or *Gebinnom*, discussed above. For instance, Ibn Adret writes of the ban opponents, "They falsified by their stupidity the entire Torah, God forbid [that it be so], and made everything into [an allegory about] Matter and Form. They forfeited life and their Rock to dwell in *She'ol*; when *She'ol* ends they will find themselves without a redeemer to redeem them."<sup>68</sup> In the Barcelona letter accompanying the

<sup>64</sup> MQp 5, p. 36 / MQd 23, p. 332, ll. 310-315.

<sup>65</sup> MQp 30, p. 76 / MQd 49, p. 466, ll. 62-63.

<sup>66</sup> MQp 24, p. 68 / MQd 43, pp. 436-437, ll. 70-72.

<sup>67</sup> In Simon b. Joseph's *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, *Zunz Jubelschrift*, Heb. sec., 162.

<sup>68</sup> MQp 10, p. 45 / MQd 28, pp. 360-361, ll. 21-24.

ban, cited above, is the idea that only the eternal fire of *Gehinnom* will allow such transgressors complete repentance.<sup>69</sup> Ibn Adret, writing to Crescas Vidal, implies that the philosophical interpretation of the youths possessed by the spiritual of rational inquiry will lead to transgressions punishable by *karet*.<sup>70</sup>

Such rabbinic terms were brought to bear, interchangeably and inconsistently, upon internal, contemporary developments within the Catalan and Occitan Jewish communities in the early fourteenth century. The writers' conceptualization of ideational transgression builds heavily upon rabbinic ideas originating in a dramatically different historical context. It is not only the content of rabbinic conceptualizations but also their nonsystematic and indistinct nature that affected the medieval discussion. Following in this tradition, and in spite of medieval efforts at standardization and codification, the fourteenth-century ban proponents did not assign distinct definitions to the rabbinic terms in order to better describe the circumstances of their own time. Instead, they continued to use rabbinic terminology and conceptualizations as indistinct references to transgressive beliefs and behaviors. Significantly, this usage indicates the degree to which ban proponents saw the boundaries they favored as a continuation of past precedents bearing the weight of rabbinic authority.

<sup>69</sup> MQp 81(a), p. 153 / MQd 101, pp. 737, ll. 69-71; see above for a translation and discussion of this line.

<sup>70</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, pp. 384-385, ll. 147-148. Technically the line is an allusions to 1 Kings 17:5, "וַיִּלֶךְ, וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּנַחַל קָרִית, אֲשֶׁר, עַל-פְּנֵי הַיַּרְדֵּי" but is almost certainly a play on the rabbinic term כרת (Dimitrovsky concurs; see p. 375, note to l. 148).

## A POST-MAIMONIDEAN WORLD

Despite living in a world suffused for over a century with the Maimonidean synthesis of rabbinics and rationalism, the thinking of the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letter-writers is remarkably uninfluenced by contemporary attempts at creed formation and theological codification, including those of Maimonides in his introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* (in the *Commentary on the Mishnah/Sirāj*) and to a certain extent in the *Shemonah Peraqim* (his introduction to *Pirgei 'Avot*, also in the *Commentary on the Mishnah/Sirāj*), *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, the *Mishneh Torah*, and *Moreh ha-Nevukhim/Dalālāt al-Ha'irīn*.<sup>71</sup> Rather than expand *kofer*, *min*, or *'epiqoros* into halakhic categories,

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<sup>71</sup> References to Maimonides' works apply to the many standard editions, as well as translations, of his works (see Twersky's bibliographical notes in *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, 561-562, 540-541). The editions I have used are as follows. For the *Commentary on the Mishnah* (including both *Pereq Ḥeleq* and *Shemonah Peraqim*), משנה עם פירוש משה בן מימון : תרגום מערבית על-פי כתב-היד המקורי, edited by Yosef Kafah (Joseph Qafḥ), 6 vols. in 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), a direct translation from the Arabic. For *Sefer ha-Mizvot*: ספר המצוות, edited by Yosef Kafah (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1971), a direct translation from the Arabic. For the *Mishneh Torah*, יוצא לאור פעם ראשונה על-פי כתבי ספר משנה תורה : יוצא לאור פעם ראשונה על-פי כתבי, edited by Yosef Kafah (Kiryat Ono: Mekhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1984-1996). For *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, מורה הנבוכים : דלא לה' אלחאירין : מקור ותרגום, edited by Yosef Kafah (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1972), for the Judeo-Arabic text and a direct Hebrew translation; מורה הנבוכים, translated by Samuel Ibn Tibbon Samuel, edited by Yehudah Even-Shemuel (Jerusalem, 1987), for the classical Hebrew translation (Judah al-Ḥarizi's competing, but uncanonized, translation is published as מורה נבוכים, translated by Judah al-Ḥarizi, edited by A. L. Schlossberg [London, 1851-1879; Reprint, Tel Aviv, 1952]; and *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), for its excellence as an English translation directly from the Arabic.

On the significance of creed in Maimonidean thought, see Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 68-70; Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10-65; Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Oxford and Portland, Ore.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 1-37; and Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 77-80, 365-370, 489-499. Notably, ban proponents' views about ideational transgression were not impacted by the handling of heresy within the Christian universities either; nor, more broadly, by the Cathar heresies or other religious movements abundant in Occitania throughout the thirteenth and into the fourteenth centuries: see J. M. M. H. Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200-1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 1-30.

as did Maimonides, they chose to obviate the need for such categories by restricting access to the philosophical texts which, they feared, might cause ideational transgression. The aim of the ban was preventative rather than punitive towards those individuals who were ostensibly out of bounds. With regards to Abba-Mari and his Occitan supporters especially, who were, after all, reacting to the integration of Maimonidean rationalism into the intellectual life of their culture, it is significant that they expressed their reservations about philosophy in rabbinic rather than Maimonidean terms.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, there were two important ways in which Maimonides' writing on ideational transgression impacted the fourteenth-century controversy: first, Maimonides' ruling that a person wishing to study the Torah's secrets, by which he meant rationalism, was influenced the proposal of a ban on underage study as the mechanism of action in the debate; and second, the very focus that Maimonides paid to matters of dogma was accepted and adopted by ban proponents

The reception of Maimonides' creedal statement of Judaism's foundational tenets in his *Commentary on the Mishnah/Sirāj*, known as the Thirteen Principles, was both remarkably uncontroversial and even popular, and at the same time deeply subversive and problematic for medieval Jewish societies to assimilate. For all that doctrinal orthodoxy and systematic theology were foreign to Judaism, Maimonides' project—indistinct thought it was, since elsewhere in his writings he is equivocal both on the significance of the Thirteen Principles and on their content—was little commented upon in the two hundred years after its promulgation, even as it was

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<sup>72</sup> Note that elsewhere in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, such systematic analysis *is* undertaken by ban proponents: for instance, Abba-Mari builds his argument against medical talismans by systematically analyzing talmudic precedents. He writes to Ibn Adret, "I realized, furthermore, that most medical remedies that are mentioned in the Talmud are divided into three categories," and proceeds to detail these systematically in several lengthy paragraphs (this statement begins the whole passage, MQp 5, pp. 34-37 / MQd 23, pp. 325-333, ll. 206-330).

popularized through the liturgy (*Yigdal* being the preeminent modern victor of a large-scale effort to incorporate the Principles into the everyday liturgy).<sup>73</sup> Menachem Kellner points out,

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Had Maimonides posited his ‘thirteen principles’ in a purely talmudic context, the work would have been seen clearly as an innovation. Given the development of systematic theology within Judaism, the example provided by Islam and Karaism, and the writings of some of Maimonides’ Jewish philosophical predecessors, Maimonides was able to posit his creed without appearing to innovate at all.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, there is little development in the century between the introduction of the Thirteen Principles and the 1304-1306 controversy of any kind of pragmatic, halakhic means of enforcing creed, creed remaining a social as opposed to a halakhic norm.

One reason for the ban proponents’ curricular approach to the problem of philosophy, as opposed to a development of legal precedent, was that the latter was not practically needed: although halakhah would seem to demand a basic definition of the ideational transgressor, in the sense that such a person is unfit to perform certain ritual acts, in practice, this never became a halakhic necessity for the functioning of the medieval *qahal*. Violators of ritual or ethical standards seem to have been punished individually.<sup>75</sup> Converts from Judaism did not pose a serious halakhic

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<sup>73</sup> Kellner, *Dogma*, 66-69; Shapiro, *Limits of Orthodox Theology*, 17-19; Moshe Halbertal, “What is the *Mishneh Torah*? On Codification and Ambivalence,” in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and his Influence*, edited by Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Adriel Kosman, “Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles in the *Mishnah Commentary*, the *Yigdal* and the *Ani Ma'amin*” [Hebrew], in *Minḥat Le-Ish*, edited by I. Warhaftig, 337-348 (Jerusalem, 1991); and Alexander Marx, “A List of Poems on the Articles of the Creed,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 9 (1918/19): 205-336.

<sup>74</sup> Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> E.g., Asher b. Yehiel’s responsum regarding a *megadef* who cursed God in a language other than Hebrew, in which he recommends that the man’s tongue be cut out (*Teshuvot ha-Rosh*, sec. 17, no. 8).



problem for medieval decisors:<sup>76</sup> in the case of voluntary as well as forced converts, the halakhah surrounding their personal status for the purposes of divorce and other matters was developed throughout the medieval period, particularly at its end.<sup>77</sup> Aside from certain questions of personal status, converts away from Judaism were clearly set apart from Jews in good standing. The case of forced converts was murkier, but until the crisis of 1391-1392 in Iberia, generally resolved by uneventful reintegration into the community, as advocated by Maimonides.<sup>78</sup> Ibn Adret wrote a responsum on the topic in which he advocated public admonition, including lashing, and private repentance for converts away from Judaism seeking to return to the community.<sup>79</sup> Certainly at the time of the 1304-1306 controversy, individual violators were never of sufficient number to warrant a systematic halakhic response, and terms such as *min* and *kofer* did not come to possess technical meanings.

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<sup>76</sup> See Gerald J. Blidstein, "Who is Not a Jew? - The Medieval Discussion," *Israel Law Review* 11 (1976): 369-390; Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, edited by Todd M. Endelman, 20-47 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987); Joseph Shatzmiller, "Converts and Judaizers in the Early Fourteenth Century," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 63-77; and Robert Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 67 (1992): 263-283.

<sup>77</sup> See David Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe - Boundaries Real and Imagined," *Past and Present* 194, no. 1 (2007): 3-34; Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, "Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in *Sefer ha-Nizzahon*," in *Hebraica veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Mark D. Meyerson, "Aragonese and Catalan Jewish Converts at the Time of the Expulsion," *Jewish History* 6 (1992); and Benjamin Scheller, "The Materiality of Difference: Converted Jews and Their Descendants in the Late Medieval Kingdom of Naples," *Medieval History Journal* 12, no. 2 (2009): 405-430.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, on the halakhic question of whether a forced convert to Christianity who wished to return to Jewish practice needed to undergo immersion in a ritual bath, see Joseph Shatzmiller, "Converts and Judaizers in the Early Fourteenth Century," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 63-77; and Kristine T. Utterback, "Conversi' Revert: Voluntary and Forced Return to Judaism in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Church History* 64, no. 1 (1995): 16-28.



Nevertheless, even if practical necessity did not impel a halakhic definition of ideational transgression, it is surprising that, in trying to legislate access to materials with the potential to cause such transgression, ban proponents were uninfluenced by Maimonides' attempts to do just that. Maimonides attempted to standardize the terms *min*, *kofer*, and *'epiqoros* (among others) as an element of his systematic exposition of the law. Significantly, this discussion primarily takes place within the context of laws of repentance (*Hilkhot Teshuvah*) in *Sefer ha-Madda'*, the controversial preliminary book of *Mishneh Torah* which attempts to express rationally the same theoretical framework of rabbinic Judaism which the fourteenth-century traditionalists so ardently protected. Maimonides presents *teshuvah* as having to do with *madda'*: in other words, he sees transgression, for which repentance is required, as deriving primarily from ideation—either due to ignorance or disinformation.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps for this reason he concentrates on defining intellectual terms such as *minut* rather than ethical or civil terms such as *ḥet*, *avon*, *'aveirah*, and *pesha'*.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, Maimonides responds to the question “what constitutes ideational transgression?” during his consideration of the root causes of transgression and the possibility of repenting. Specifically, he

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<sup>79</sup> *Responsa*, “Volume 7” (Warsaw, 1908), no. 411.

<sup>80</sup> In itself this is not a radical notion, considering that rabbinic *teshuvah* is, too, a largely internal process and one that may be termed spiritual as opposed to juridical. Nevertheless, halakhah demands concrete actions surrounding *teshuvah* required by actions in the community, and on the communal period of repentance culminating in Yom Kippur, as well as other ritual acts. Maimonides might equally well have placed his discussion of repentance elsewhere in the *Mishneh Torah*, and his placement of it in *Sefer ha-Madda'* remains meaningful.

<sup>81</sup> Maimonides is somewhat inconsistent on the question of whether cognition can constitute a transgression, as Shapiro points out in *Limits of Orthodox Theology*, 5. In the *Commentary on the Mishnah* to Sanhedrin 10:1, he states that one who doubts a core principle of faith is a heretic subject to ban, while elsewhere in *Sefer ha-Madda'*, Maimonides implies that merely thinking a thought does not constitute a transgression: “ולא עבודה זרה בלבד הוא שאסור להיפנות אחריה במחשבה, אלא כל מחשבה שגורמת לו לאדם לעקור עיקר מעיקרי התורה—מוזהרין אנו שלא להעלותה על ליבנו, ולא נסיח דעתנו לכך ונחשוב ונימשך אחר הרהורי הלב: מפני שדעתו של אדם קצרה, ולא כל הדעות יכולות להשיג האמת על בוריו; אם יימשך כל אדם אחר מחשבותיו” (*Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 2:3).

defines ideational transgression in reference to those transgressions which will result in denial of life into the world-to-come, but for which repentance remains possible.<sup>82</sup>

The *min*, *'epiqoros*, and *kofer* are discussed in turn by Maimonides as distinct terms, in contrast to their usage in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters. The Maimonidean *min*, *'epiqoros*, and *kofer* appears amidst other serious objectors to those theological precepts which Maimonides considers normative and necessary:

Those who do not have a place in the world-to-come, and are instead cut off and lost, excommunicated due to the vastness of their wickedness and transgression, forever and ever, are as follows: the *minim*; the *'epiqorisim*; those who deny (*koferim*) the Torah; those who deny (*koferim*) the resurrection of the dead; those who deny (*koferim*) the coming of a messiah; the *meshumadim*; those who cause the public to transgress (*maḥti'eī ha-rabim*); those who remove themselves from the ways of the people (*porshim mi-darkhei ha-zibbur*); he who transgresses overtly and with obvious intention, as did Jehoiakim; informers (*mosrim*); those who instill fear (*metilei 'eimah*) among the public, not for the sake of heaven; those who spill blood; those who speak malevolently (*lashon ha-ra'*); and he who reverses his circumcision (*moshekh 'orlato*).<sup>83</sup>

Here Maimonides differentiates between the *min*, the *'epiqoros*, and the other classes of transgressors whose misdeeds are sufficient to deny them a place in the world-to-come, implying that there are qualitative differences among them. He appropriates rabbinic terminology alongside various traditional concepts and fits them onto his largely theological schema of ideational transgressors, covering all types so as to provide a means of repentance for an array of transgressors. The Maimonidean *min* is thus not the same as the *kofer*, and the *kofer ba-Torah* is not the same as the *kofer bi-teḥiyat ha-metim*. This is the step not taken by the fourteenth-century traditionalists, who continued to employ rabbinic terms loosely, without defining their theological value.

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<sup>82</sup> *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:14.

<sup>83</sup> *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:6.

Maimonides goes on to provide detailed definitions of the terms he mentions, which are nowhere mentioned or reflected in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters, including those written by opponents of the ban. Consider Maimonides' precise description of the ideas held by a *min*:

Those who are called *minim* hold five positions: [1] he who says that there is no God, and that the world has no leader; [2] he who says there is such a leader, but that there are two or more; [3] he who says that there is one such master, but that he possesses a body and form; [4] and so, he who says that He is not the only First Cause nor Rock of all; [5] and also, he who worships a god other than Him, so as to be an intermediary between himself and the master of the universe.<sup>84</sup>

Maimonides' systematizing project is evident here: *min* becomes the category of ideational transgressor who espouses incorrect beliefs about the nature of the unitary, non-anthropomorphic God that Maimonides advocated as the normative and correct view.<sup>85</sup> While the Maimonidean *min* would certainly include the sectarian—according to its most precise usage in rabbinic literature, when it is so used—so too would the Maimonidean *kofer*, and it is actually in discussing the *kofer* that Maimonides emphasizes sectarianism. He thus molds the term *min* to describe one who errs specifically in his understanding of God's essential unity. The usage of *min* in the 1304-1306 controversy, in which the term is broadly applied to Jews holding incorrect views, certainly does not oppose Maimonides' theologically-focused definition; but, it is also nowhere used with the degree of precision corresponding to Maimonides' idea that *minut* has to do with mistaking God's

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<sup>84</sup> *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:7.

<sup>85</sup> Note the objections of Abraham b. David (Ra'avad), who protested the idea that any degree of anthropomorphism rendered one a transgressor, writing in his *Hassagot* to the *Mishneh Torah*: "Why has he [Maimonides] called such a person a *min*, when there are a number of people better and greater than him who follow that [anthropomorphic] view based on their understanding of scripture, more so than upon the words of the *'aggadot* which corrupt one's opinions? (Cited by Isadore Twersky's in *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* [Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1962], 282; see also Twersky's translation of this statement, *ibid.*, and his comments on textual variants among manuscripts, 282, n. 52).

essence specifically. The fourteenth-century traditionalists use *min* generically, and interchangeably with *'epiqoros* and *kofer*, both terms which Maimonides defines precisely:

Those who are called *'epiqorosim* hold three positions: [1] he who says that there is no prophecy whatsoever, and that there is no knowledge that reaches the human mind<sup>86</sup> from the Creator; [2] he who disavows the prophecy of our teacher Moses; and [3] he who says that the Creator does not know the deeds of human beings. Each of these three [i.e., on his own] is an *'epiqoros*.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast to the Maimonidean *min*, who incorrectly perceives God's unity, the *'epiqoros* incorrectly perceives God's omniscience, including His ability to know and affect the human world.<sup>88</sup> Thus are *min* and *'epiqoros* used to categorize types of heretical theological views; so too with *kofer*. Maimonides had initially (in 3:6) differentiated three different types of *koferim*: the denier of resurrection, of the coming of the messiah, and finally of the Torah. Following the discussion of the *'epiqoros*, this last type, the *kofer ba-Torah*, is further elaborated into three subtypes:

Those who deny (*koferim*) the Torah hold three positions: [1] he who says that the Torah is not from the Lord, not even one verse, not even one word—and if he claims that Moses spoke it from his own mouth, then he is a *kofer* of the Torah; [2] so also with him who denies (*kofer*) its interpretation, which is the Oral Torah, and disavows its transmitters, like a Sadducee (*zaddoq*) and a Boethusian (*baitos*); and [3] he who says that the Creator changed this or that commandment, and that the Torah is presently invalid, although it was from God, like the Christians (*nozriyim*) and Muslims (*bagariyim*).<sup>89</sup> Each of these three is a denier (*kofer*) of the Torah.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Literally, “heart”; I have translated according to standard medieval understanding.

<sup>87</sup> *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:8.

<sup>88</sup> The definition the *'epiqoros* in the *Mishneh Torah* differs somewhat from the characteristics of the person Epicurus as discussed in the *Moreh*, seemingly indicating that Maimonides understood the two terms to be separate, in accordance with his claim that *'epiqoros* was to be derived from the Hebrew *p-q-r*. For instance, Epicurus is described as an atheist who believes that only chance governs human life, more closely matching the *Mishneh Torah*'s definition *min*: see *Moreh* 2:13 and 3:17. Epicurus is also described as denying prophecy (2:32) and positing the eternity of matter (1:73).

<sup>89</sup> On the term *הגריים*, cf. *Sefer ha-Kuzari* 4:11, 22.

<sup>90</sup> *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:8.

Thus, the *kofer* is characterized by his denial of the divine origin of the Torah; he might also deny basic principles such as resurrection and the messiah, but even he accepts others, such as God's unity and in the existence of prophecy, the rejection of the divine origin of even one Torah verse renders him a *kofer*. A *min* is characterized by his denial of monotheism; he might accept the divine origin of each word of the Torah, but believe also in a demiurge. An *'epiqoros* is characterized by his denial of divine engagement in the world; he might accept the divine Torah and God's unity, but claim that God has no knowledge of particulars. And yet, nothing in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters evinces any sort of awareness of these Maimonidean definitions. A century into the future, at the time of the 1304-1306 controversy, the use of rabbinic terminology to denote ideational transgression is no more precise than it was prior to Maimonides' efforts.

It is as if the fourteenth-century discussion proceeded without reference to *Sefer ha-Madda'* at all, with one important exception: it appears that Maimonides' comments in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* influenced ban proponents to suggest a minimum age for the study of philosophy. There, Maimonides writes, alluding to the four who entered *pardes*,

Four entered *pardes*: and although they were towering figures of great wisdom, not all of them possessed the capacity to know and to understand all matters in their entirety. Thus I say that it is not proper to stroll about the orchard, except for he who has filled his stomach with bread and meat; and this bread and meat is the clarification of the impermissible and the permissible and all that is related to them according to the rest of the commandments.<sup>91</sup>

Although Maimonides does not mention any age restrictions, he states that a seeker into the deeper meaning of scripture must first complete the traditional, talmudic curriculum. This view is famously reiterated in the introduction to Part I of *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, which likewise includes

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<sup>91</sup> *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:13. See also 4:11.

rationalistic study with the hidden secrets of the Torah (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Ma'aseh Bereshit*) prohibited to one who has not been duly trained.<sup>92</sup> In advocating for an explicit age restriction, ban proponents invoke Maimonides' trope of filling one's stomachs with "bread and meat"—i.e., Torah—before embarking on speculative study. Moses b. Isaac ha-Levi (N'Escapet Melit) writes in his letter of support for the ban:

As the *ga'on* said, teacher of the wise and leader of the philosophers (*filosofim*), our teacher Moses [Maimonides] of blessed memory: One must not stroll in the orchard (*pardes*) until he has filled his belly with bread and meat. If [it seems that] time is too short to stretch out in,<sup>93</sup> the vigor of a twenty-five-year-old has not abated<sup>94</sup> and his strength is not lacking, and his time to study wisdom is yet great; the forces of nature will not hold him back nor will forgetfulness get the better of him.<sup>95</sup>

Abraham b. Joseph of Aix writes, "Before their [the opponents'] belly could fill up with bread and meat, they entered the orchard (*pardes*) as if a stamp of approval had been issued into their very hands."<sup>96</sup> This metaphor attempts to ground the age restriction and the use of the *pardes* narrative to discuss transgressive ideas in Maimonides. Both come together in Abba-Mari's *Sefer ha-Yare'ah*, in which he locates the citation in *Sefer ha-Madda'*:

The rabbi, righteous teacher, wrote in *Sefer ha-Madda'* that it is not proper to stroll about the orchard, except for him who has filled his stomach with bread and meat, which means the interpretation of the Torah and the commandments. And thus was the judgment, that

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<sup>92</sup> In Pines' translation, "The Account of the Beginning [*Ma'aseh Bereshit*] is identical with natural science, and the Account of the Chariot [*Ma'aseh Merkavah*] with divine science [metaphysics]; and [I] have explained the rabbinic saying: The Account of the Chariot ought not to be taught even to one man, except if he be wise and able to understand by himself, in which case only the chapter headings may be transmitted to him [Ḥagigah 11b, 13a]" (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 1:6).

<sup>93</sup> Based on the metaphor in Isaiah 25:20.

<sup>94</sup> Based on the description of Moses at his death in Deuteronomy 34:7.

<sup>95</sup> MQp 84, p. 158 / MQd 105, p. 756, l. 54.

<sup>96</sup> MQp 44, p. 98 / MQd 63, p. 554, ll. 33-34. For a longer citation of this passage and a discussion of it, see below.

of the four who entered *pardes*, none except Rabbi Akiva remained, who entered in peace and came out in peace.<sup>97</sup>

Whereas Moses b. Isaac and Abraham of Aix cite the passage in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, Abba-Mari explicates its implications by defining “bread and meat” as traditional Torah exegesis, thus suggesting that proper talmudic study is inoculation against the dangers of entering the *pardes* of speculative thought.

Perhaps the greatest impact these Maimonidean expansions had upon the discussion in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters, however, was the amount of attention they paid to ideational transgression and the role of proper belief. Despite the lack of debate over the existence or the specifics of a Jewish creed, the Thirteen Principles, along with the codificatory efforts of Maimonides elsewhere (*Sefer ha-Mizvot*, *Mishneh Torah*, and *Moreh ha-Nevukhim/Dalālāt al-Ha'irīn*) normalized the discussion of theological precepts among Jewish intellectuals.<sup>98</sup> All of the Maimonidean controversies, in fact, are characterized by an unusually keen and untraditional interest in theology stimulated by the encounter with Greco-Islamic rationalism.<sup>99</sup> On the face of it, this seems

<sup>97</sup> MQp SY 3, p. 126 / MQd SY 3, p. 651, ll. 10-12.

<sup>98</sup> On codification and creed formation, see, *inter alia*, Menachem Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, 4 vols., rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994); Judah D. Galinsky, “Ashkenazim in Sefarad: The Rosh and the Tur on the Codification of Jewish Law,” *Jewish Law Annual* 16 (2006): 3-23; Moshe Halbertal, “What is the *Mishneh Torah*? On Codification and Ambivalence,” in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and his Influence*, edited by Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); H. J. Zimmels, “Codifications by the Jews of Spain,” in *The Sephardi Heritage: Essays on the History and Cultural Contribution of the Jews of Spain and Portugal*, vol. 1, edited by R. D. Barnett, 402-424 (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1971); and Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) and “The Shulḥan 'Arukh: Enduring Code of Jewish Law,” *Judaism* 16 (1967): 141-158.

<sup>99</sup> There were additional factors that stimulated the earliest systematization of Jewish theology in the ga'onic period; see Kellner, *Dogma*, 4-8; Shapiro, *Limits of Orthodox Theology*, 4-6. It could be argued that

contradictory: ban proponents were entirely unconcerned that the insistence upon principles of belief originated in the very same methodology of those texts they were trying to restrict access to. Because rabbinic tradition did not bequeath to medieval Jewry a systematic treatment of its ideology, the project of creating one necessarily looked to paradigms outside of authoritative texts. One explanation is offered by Marina Rustow, who has argued that doctrinal discussions are instigated by periods of historical change: “Masking historical change is one of the hallmarks of the defence of orthodoxy and the pursuit of heresy.”<sup>100</sup> As a result, creed formation, despite its origin in rationalist methodology, was congenial to the fourteenth-century ban proponents, who recognized that the framework of Jewish life erected in the rabbinic period was threatened by ideas contradicting those that appeared in the creeds developed internally by Maimonides and others.

#### ANTI-RATIONALIST SLOGANS

Ban proponents routinely levy several distinct allegations about their opponents' views, citing them in shorthand, propagandistic slogans; these slogans offer clues as to the particular ideas that ban proponents found problematic and potentially subversive. The slogans demonstrate that the philosophical positions that troubled proponents of the ban include the idea that biblical narratives are non-historical and non-literal; the supremacy of the natural order, meaning that miracles and prophecy must occur as natural, rather than supernatural, processes; God's delegation

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ideational transgression was *technically* impossible until the formation of Jewish creed, a process that may be said to begin with Se'adiah's *Sefer 'Emunot ve-De'ot* (*Amānāt w'al-I'tiqādāt*) in the tenth century.

<sup>100</sup> Rustow, “Karaites Real and Imagined,” 39.



of power to the spheres of the fixed stars; and the world's eternity.<sup>101</sup> A typical example of the way these positions are encapsulated in slogans can be found in a letter by Crescas Vidal, in which he reports on the transgressive ideas contained in a book he had heard about, but did not personally examine:

I can also report to you, my lords, that when I passed through Montpellier, the leader En Todros de Beaucaire told me that one of the philosophizers had written a Torah commentary in the manner of Greek wisdom, and did not include in his commentary an iota of the plain meaning of the Torah, making of everything Matter and Form. From what he [Todros] told me, it reached that point that he [the rationalist commentator] maintained that Armafel and the kings of his coalition imply the four elements<sup>102</sup>—just think what will follow from this.<sup>103</sup>

Here Crescas alludes to the complete allegorization of the Torah (“making of everything Matter and Form”) and the transmutation of certain prophecies from political foretelling into scientific symbolism (“Armafel and the kings of his coalition imply the four elements”).

First and foremost among the slogans is the charge that Abraham and Sarah were figurative constructions representing Platonic-Aristotelian Form and Matter,<sup>104</sup> rather than actual human beings. For instance, in describing an erstwhile rationalist to Ibn Adret, Abba-Mari states, “Concerning the matter of the preacher who depicted Abraham and Sarah as Matter and Form,

<sup>101</sup> A few such recurring tropes culled from rabbinic literature denote ideational transgression more broadly, but do not relate to specific principles. These include the trope of filling one's stomachs with bread and meat—i.e., Torah—before embarking on esoteric (in this context, philosophical) study, as in Moses b. Isaac ha-Levi (N'Escapet Melit)'s letter of support for the traditionalists (MQp 84, p. 158 / MQd 105, p. 756, l. 54. Another is the motif of the foreign seductress, a personification of a philosophy that emphasizes its ability to captivate young men, as in the complaint of the elders of Argentièrre that “sons embrace the bosom of a foreign woman” (MQp 47, p. 102 / MQd 66, p. 566, l. 31).

<sup>102</sup> King Armafel of Shin'ar was part of an eastern coalition of four kings that included King Khederla'omer of 'Eilam, King Tid'al of Goim, and King Ariokh of Ellasar, described in Gen. 15.

<sup>103</sup> MQd 12, p. 48 / MQd 30, pp. 370-371, ll. 72-87.

<sup>104</sup> The order is always given as “matter and form,” for the sake of the rhyme.

one of his noble relatives told me that he greatly regretted this.”<sup>105</sup> This shorthand way of referring to the preacher’s ideas suffices as a description of his heretical tendencies. Abba-Mari goes on to report that the preacher recognized the figuration of Abraham and Sarah as a “sin.”<sup>106</sup> Similarly, Don Todros de Bilqieri wrote in his hefty deathbed letter of support, “When we hear that Abraham and Sarah are Matter and Form, you [who claim that] are like the children of strangers.”<sup>107</sup> This particular allegory functions as shorthand for the rationalists’ claim that scripture necessarily contains the same truths contained in philosophy.

Often mentioned by the traditionalists along with the Abraham and Sarah allegory, though occurring somewhat less frequently, were the ideas that the twelve tribes of Israel were an allegory for the twelve signs of the zodiac, the four kings of Genesis 14:1-2 an allegory for the four elements, and the Urim and Thummim an allegory for the astrolabe. Ibn Adret complained directly to the Montpellier rationalists, “This man wrote books...[arguing that] the four kings who fought the five are merely the four elements, and the twelve sons of Jacob are the twelve signs of the zodiac.”<sup>108</sup> In his letter about the controversy preserved in *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, Menahem ha-Meiri mentions a recently-deceased Montpellier aristocrat who wrote in his books and pamphlets that “Abraham and Sarah allude to Matter and Form, and of the tribes, they allude to the twelve signs

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<sup>105</sup> MQp 32, p. 77 / MQd 51, p. 468-469, ll. 1-2.

<sup>106</sup> MQp 32, p. 77 / MQd 51, p. 469, ll. 6-7. See Ibn Adret’s conciliatory message to the preacher in question, which is a pun on the slogan, ll. 13-16.

<sup>107</sup> MQp 53, p. 114 / MQd 72, p. 608, ll. 95-96.

<sup>108</sup> MQp 27, p. 72 / MQd 46, p. 451, ll. 44-45. The man in question is likely Levi b. Abraham. Notably, Ibn Adret opens his tirade of complaints about inappropriate allegorizing with an allusion to Abraham and Sarah, ll. 40-41.

of the zodiac.”<sup>109</sup> The allegorizing of the Urim and Thummim was apparently unknown to Ibn Adret and Abba-Mari until the controversy was several months old, when it is first mentioned—perhaps reflecting the content of current rationalist discussion. Ibn Adret uses it in his letter to the Argentièrè *qahal* to exemplify the excesses of the rationalists,<sup>110</sup> and then turns to Abba-Mari, apprising him of this new allegory:

Now they’ve increased their false testimony, denying the principles of the Torah and increasing its destruction, imprinting tattoos upon their foreheads: for he who writes and thinks that the Urim and Thummim are the copper instrument discovered by gentile sages, which is called the astrolabe—his fire shall not die down.<sup>111</sup>

The allegorization of the Temple instruments was particularly troubling to Ibn Adret because of the secular nature of the astrolabe, a utilitarian tool invented by non-Jews.<sup>112</sup> Like the allegorizations that made of the twelve tribes of Israel symbols for the zodiac or four historical

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<sup>109</sup> Simon b. Joseph, *Hoshen ha-Mishpat*, edited by David Kaufmann in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz*, Heb. sec., 143-174 (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1974), 154.

<sup>110</sup> MQp 48, p. 104 / MQd 67, p. 573, ll. 46-48. Notably, Ibn Adret refers to the astrolabe as “the copper instrument (*keli neḥoshet*) that is called ‘astrolabe,’ which is made by non-Jews”—almost certainly a reference to Abraham Ibn Ezra’s treatise on the astrolabe titled *Sefer Keli ha-Neḥoshet*, extant in three recensions.

<sup>111</sup> MQp 49, p. 105 / MQd 68, p. 578, ll. 30-33. “His fire shall not die down” is an allusion to the severe closing verse of Isaiah, 66:24, in conjunction with Numbers 11:2.

<sup>112</sup> Abba-Mari’s views are more moderate, as conveyed in a conversation he records between himself and a Montpellier *meyuḥad*, which took place in the synagogue during Parashat Balaq (MQp 50, p. 106-107 / MQd 69, pp. 582-583, ll. 36-45). According to his own report, when the *hazzan* read the verse “and there were *qesamim* in their hands” (Numbers 22:7), Abba-Mari turned to his fellow and remarked that the *qesamim* were astrological instruments such as the quadrant and astrolabe. He meant this as *peshat*, he writes defensively, but his fellow was surprised and admonished him, as though he had said something forbidden (“כאלו אמרתי דבר אסורי” l. 42). It appears that the man thought Abba-Mari was suggesting that the astrolabe and similar instruments should be banned. Abba-Mari contends here that they have permitted uses that are even beneficial, but proceeds to argue that, nevertheless, astronomical instruments are not necessary for the proper observance of ritual, as the example of Abraham shows. He adds that he heard that Judah b. Barzillai called the astrolabe *’isur lav* (“it is forbidden,” a play on words, ll. 87-88). But, Abba-Mari notes, he also heard that Ibn Adret permits its use on Shabbat (ll. 88-89), which he finds surprising.

kings in Canaan symbols for the elements, the Urim and Thummim allegory pointed to the denial of the literal reality of biblical narrative and granting authority to profane knowledge and human reason.

Related phrases that recur throughout the ban proponents' letters are the charge of "falsifying the Torah" (*'oseh ha-Torah plaster*)<sup>113</sup> and "interpreting by means of defective allegories" (*dorshim be-haggadot shel dofi*).<sup>114</sup> Ibn Adret complained of an opponent, "He falsifies the Torah (*'oseh ha-Torah plaster*), uproots all of the boundaries, and subverts the literal meaning of the Torah (*peshatei ha-Torah*)."<sup>115</sup> Ibn Adret wrote directly to Levi b. Abraham, telling him that he had been apprised that certain ban opponents "had distanced themselves from their fellows, filling whole rooms with the books of Aristotle and Plato, interpreting by means of defective allegories (*dorshim be-haggadot shel dofi*)."<sup>116</sup> In another letter, he complained of careless rationalists, "They falsified the Torah and its commandments (*samu ha-Torah u-mizveteiha plaster*), so that it became for them a sanctioned release from obligation (*beter*)."<sup>117</sup> Such defective readings are exemplified by the symbolic value attributed to Abraham and Sarah, the twelve tribes, and the Urim and Thummim. Like the Abraham/Matter and Sarah/Form allegory, all three of these represented to the traditionalists the transgressive complex of ideas implied in the rationalists' rereading of scripture: that external knowledge was just as valid and perhaps more significant than Jewish tradition; that

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<sup>113</sup> A rabbinic phrase, as in Berakhot 31b.

<sup>114</sup> This is another rabbinic phrase, as used in Sanhedrin 99b. Here *haggadot* seems to mean "allegories," analogical or parabolic readings that distort the true meaning of the scriptural text.

<sup>115</sup> MQp 27, p. 72 / MQd 46, p. 451, ll. 43-44.

<sup>116</sup> MQp 16, p. 54 / MQd 34, p. 392, ll. 27-28.

<sup>117</sup> MQp 10, p. 45 / MQd 28, p. 360, ll. 18-19.

philosophy (especially, perhaps, natural philosophy) possesses an authority commensurate with that of revelation; and that the biblical account was not literally true—or, at least, that it was unimportant whether it was literally true. To emphasize this, Ibn Adret went as far as to define a proper believer as “a believer in Abraham and Sarah and their son Isaac”—that is, as one who objected to the allegorizing the patriarchs and matriarchs.<sup>118</sup>

Though these slogans reflected ideas found in rationalist literature, their uniformity and the number of times each is repeated indicates that they were reductionist presentations showcasing the traditionalists’ insistence on literal acceptance of biblical narratives. For instance, the allegories about Sarah and Abraham, the twelve tribes, and the four kings are all found in Levi b. Abraham’s *Livyat Hen*.<sup>119</sup> However, they are hardly representative of Levi’s central concerns, nor of the density of his exposition. For instance, the suggestion that Jacob’s sons are to be conflated with the zodiac occurs within the context of a broader discussion about Jacob’s ascendancy over Esau. Levi argues that Jacob’s encounters with angels may be understood astrologically, in that the embodied angels who visit him are governed by the stars, which constitute a class of angels—an argument built upon Abraham Ibn Ezra’s comment on Genesis 23:20.<sup>120</sup> “It is possible that the star

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<sup>118</sup> MQp 49, p. 105 / MQd 68, p. 578. 28.

<sup>119</sup> Charles Touati, “La controverse de 1303–1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques,” *Revue des études juives* 117 (1968): 30–31. These appear in Treatise 6; Touati cites the “short version” of *Livyat Hen* preserved in Bodleian Ms. Mich. 519 (Oxford), in which these allegories occur on ff. 38v, 68v, and 71v, respectively. On the schema and recensions of *Livyat Hen*, and more on its contents, see Chapter 5.

<sup>120</sup> In the long version of *Livyat Hen*, Treatise Six, Part 1, Chapter 32 (in Pillar 2, “Boaz”); published in

*Livyat Hen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah (Book Six, Introduction and Part One)* [Hebrew], edited by Howard Kreisel (Be’er Sheva’: Ben Gurion University Press, 2007), 703–704.

ruling over the constellation at that time was responsible for Jacob's success," Levi writes.<sup>121</sup>

Though there is much that a traditionalist might find objectionable here, notably absent is the notion that Jacob is merely a symbol. In this manner, ban proponents simplified rationalist allegory; they did not engage with the idea presented by the allegory, nor were they necessarily aware of the details of rationalist exegesis. These simplifications were made in an attempt to sensationalize rationalist allegory, inciting sharp response to the perceived danger that such ideas carried. This way, supporters could also use the slogans to refer to the allegories out of hand, without having direct knowledge of the materials or sermons in which they were disseminated. In this sense, the slogans, such as Abraham and Sarah being equated to Matter and Form, do not adequately represent the ideas of rationalists, and instead reflect the traditionalists' sense that denial of the literal, historical sense of the narratives of the Torah, and especially of the book of Genesis, were potentially transgressive.

In addition to these refrains caricaturing the ideas of their opponents, ban proponents also charged their opponents directly with denying four distinct theological positions: the existence of miracles, prophecy, divine providence, and the world's createdness. In his headnote to the first public circulatory letter sent between Barcelona and Montpellier, for example, Abba-Mari explains that this letter was intended to advise rationalists on how to deal with the "two or three" radicals in their midst, "who deny (*koferim*) the miracles of the Torah (*moftei ha-Torah*), do not believe in providence (*bilti ma'aminim ba-hashgahah*), and interpret the principles of the Torah (*'iqqarei ha-*

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<sup>121</sup> In Kreisel, ed., *Livyat Hen* (2007), 704.

*Torah*) as trite.”<sup>122</sup> Abba-Mari once described Ibn Adret thus: “He [Ibn Adret] wages war with Aristotle and his allies who believe in the eternality of the universe (*ha-qadmut*), deniers of the miracles (*makhṣhei ha-moftim*) who diminish the divine, deniers of providence (*koferim ba-bashgahah*) who do not give ear.”<sup>123</sup> Abba-Mari would underscore the significance of denying miracles, creation, and providence in his Introduction, as well:

They made their own signs into indications contraverting (*le-bakḥbish*) the miracles (*moftim*) and the laws (*datot*), when they saw that there was respite, for there is no one in our generation who would rebuke and none to receive admonishment; because of this a strident voice was heard to spread deceit (*le-khazev*) regarding creation and to deny (*li-kepor*) providence.<sup>124</sup>

This brief statement neatly captures Abba-Mari’s argument, as befitting the purposes of his introductory essay. The apathy of Montpellier’s leadership, he suggests, emboldened ban opponents to use radical allegory to argue against miracles and even laws. Having disavowed the authority of law and the possibility of miracle without hearing a valid response, Abba-Mari continues, set the stage for such radicals to refute both *ex nihilo* creation and God’s omniscience and omnipotence. This downward spiral is progressive, using the “external” method of allegoresis to build an argument that is naturalistic, antinomian, and conceives of God as First Cause. At the root of these incorrect and dangerous positions are physics and metaphysics (*ḥokhmat ha-teva‘ ve-ha-’elohut*), Abba-Mari later states.<sup>125</sup> Ibn Adret concurs, explaining this as an inevitable conclusion of radical

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<sup>122</sup> MQd 38, p. 409, ll. 6-7.

<sup>123</sup> MQd 23, p. 65 / MQd 42, p. 427, ll. 16-18.

<sup>124</sup> MQp Introduction, p. 3/ MQd Introduction, p. 227, ll. 29-32. Abba-Mari’s choice to model the phrase “וַיֵּרָא פֶּרְעֹה כִּי הִיְתָה הָרוּחָה, וְהַכִּבֵּד אֶת-לִבּוֹ, וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם” on Ex. 8:11, may be meaningful here insofar as this verse is a *locus classicus* for the discussion of free will in medieval Jewish philosophy (e.g., Shemot Rabbah 13:3; the Ramban’s comment on Exodus 7:3).

<sup>125</sup> MQp Introduction, p. 4 / MQd Introduction, p. 228, l. 43.

allegoresis: “They call natural phenomena ‘Intellects’ and make parables out of the true prophets—is there none among all the sons the Torah has raised who will rebuke them?”<sup>126</sup> These statements are not detailed theological refutations of the positions rationalists supposedly took, intended instead as self-evident examples of where rationalist interpretation is leading. In this capacity they capture the theological requirements perceived by ban proponents as essential to Jewish life: belief in the reality of prophecy, miracles, providence, and creation. Later, in writing the theological introduction to *Minḥat Qena'ot*, Abba-Mari would propose a creed of three principles which emphasized God’s supremacy, the creation of the world, and divine providence.<sup>127</sup>

These direct references to problematic beliefs, together with the repeated slogans, form a picture of specific philosophical positions which ban proponents considered transgressive: that the foundational history of the people Israel is symbolic; that nature limits the miraculous and disallows prophecy; that God has no involvement in the earthly world and perhaps no knowledge of particulars; that the world is eternal and uncreated; and that the intelligences are delegated real power from God. Underlying all of these positions is the notion that revelation must accord with human reason. Whether or not ban opponents actually endorsed any of these principles—and the evidence from their writings suggests they did not—these were the positions that their opponents imputed to them. These positions were, perhaps, logical (and radical) conclusions to be drawn from the rationalist contention that scripture could not be nonsensical and unnatural. Though largely

<sup>126</sup> MQp 10, p. 45 / MQd 28, p. 360, ll. 19-21.

<sup>127</sup> See especially MQp ch. 4, p. 7 / MQp 4, pp. 235-236, as well as MQp ch. 5, 10, 13 and 15 / MQd 5, 13, and 15. The only one of these principles elaborated upon in *Sefer ha-Yare'ah* is divine providence, but within the context of discrediting Aristotle, not as a creedal principle in and of itself; see ch. 7 of *Sefer ha-Yare'ah* MQp, p. 127 / MQd 77, p. 654.



hypothetical, the positions proponents imputed to their opposition provided for them a concept of transgressive ideas. Inversely, they defined a Jewish creed that at minimum required belief in the historicity of Torah narratives, the world's creation, and God's omniscience and omnipotence.

#### ASTROLOGICAL MEDICINE AS IDOLATRY AND SORCERY

A further clue as to how ban proponents understood ideational transgression can be deduced from Abba-Mari's complaints about astrological medical remedies. While he will quickly drop the subject, which he brings up largely as halakhic bait in order to draw Ibn Adret into the debate, in the beginning Abba-Mari argues fervently that certain usages of astrology are transgressive on grounds of idolatry, and deny the essential principle of God's oneness.<sup>128</sup> He was apparently not alone in his feeling that reliance upon the power of astrology for healing purposes was halakhically impermissible. As mentioned previously, Ibn Adret had already written a response to just that question (posed by an unknown Occitan questioner), as we know because he objects to Abba-Mari's request for his involvement on the grounds that he has already dealt with the issue definitively. Ibn Adret then expresses his exasperation that Abba-Mari hadn't read the responsum he had already circulated.<sup>129</sup> Responding to Abba-Mari, he reiterates that astrological remedies, though they seem to be idolatrous or to represent a weakness of faith, are among those remedies

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<sup>128</sup> Abba-Mari mentions that in making this claim, he is following Maimonides' view in Part 3 of the *Moreh*. It is unclear which section of Part 3 Abba-Mari has in mind here, and Dimitrovsky suggests, in fact, that nothing of the sort is to be found there; I suggest instead that Abba-Mari may have in mind Chapter 11.

<sup>129</sup> This responsum may even be the one on the subject preserved within the printed edition of Ibn Adret's responsa (in "Volume 1"); Joseph Shatzmiller suggests it is almost certain and, moreover, that Ibn Adret was responding to Isaac de Lattes, who, Abba-Mari reports in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, had reservations about the use of astrology in medicine ("In Search of the 'Book of Figures': Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 7 [1982], 384).

permitted by the Talmud due to their life-saving capabilities. Abba-Mari, in turn, insists that Ibn Adret's approval had led to abuse of astrological talismans that was blatantly idolatrous. He cites a specific case that demonstrates his concern, that of a kidney cure involving the "Sign of the Lion," a drawing of a lion without a tongue culled from a book entitled *Sefer ha-Zurot* (*Book of Figures*). Joseph Shatzmiller has identified this *Sefer ha-Zurot* with a unique Cambridge manuscript entitled *Sefer Shneim-ʿAsar Mazzalot* (*Book of the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac*), a Hebrew translation or epitome of a Latin work, made around 1300, which the anonymous translator refers to as *Sefer ha-Zurot*.<sup>130</sup> This kidney cure is also attested by Arnau de Vilanova, who enthusiastically recommended it, writing, "Placing the Sign of the Lion upon the loins prevents the pain sensation of kidney stones"; in addition, the anonymous treatise *De sigillis* identifies the efficacy of the Sign of the Lion as deriving from the power of the zodiac sign Leo.<sup>131</sup> Abba-Mari claims that many in his community, including the renowned rationalist Isaac de Lattes, considered the Sign of the Lion to be impermissible on grounds of idolatry:

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<sup>130</sup> Cambridge University Library Ms. Add. 1741 (Cambridge), ff. 94v-97v, cited by Shatzmiller, "In Search of the 'Book of Figures,'" 398-399.

<sup>131</sup> *De parte operative*, f. 127r; cited by Michael R. McVaugh in *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285-1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163, n. 128. McVaugh notes that Arnau also recommends the Sign of the Lion as a cure for kidney stones in *Speculum medicine*, f. 7r (cap. 18), and a letter of Pope Boniface VIII records that Arnau successfully performed talismanic healing by means of the Sign of the Lion on the pope (the letter is published in Heinrich Finke, ed., *Aus den Tagen Bonifaz VIII* [Munich, 1902], xxvi-xxvii). The identification of the kidneys (and hence the Sign of the Lion) with the constellation Leo is made in the treatise *De sigillis*, attributed to Arnau, in which specific instructions are given for recitations to be made while manufacturing the talisman (Psalm 35:23 and 43:1) and verses to be written on the finished piece (Revelations 5:5), f. 302r. See McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 163-164, and Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 132-133. See also Joseph Ziegler, "The Medieval Kidney," *American Journal of Nephrology* 22, no. 2-3 (2002): 152-159.

All those here who are knowledgeable in what is permissible and what is forbidden, and all the learned men of this place, all are inclined to give it their opprobrium. This includes the great scholar Rabbi Isaac de Lattes who drew this figure himself and actualized it, but was concerned about this ruling regarding its preparation and use it for healing and these were his words on the matter: “Truly, even though I have made it [the Sign of the Lion], it is in my opinion forbidden, but what could I do when the great rabbi has allowed it, he whom I would trust even if he were to say that right is left and left is right.”<sup>132</sup>

By citing Lattes, Abba-Mari emphasizes that even his opponents believed such use of medical talismans was halakhically forbidden due to concerns over idolatry. Though Ibn Adret was never convinced of this contention, the critique of medical talismans is an attempt to declare certain uses of astrology *‘avodah zarah*, defining widely-accepted contemporary medical practices as out-of-bounds.

Like *‘avodah zarah*, *kishuf* is a charge levied relatively often against ban opponents in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, especially in the discussion of medical talismans; Abba-Mari argues that the Sign of the Lion and other astrological-medical remedies constitutes sorcery as well as idolatry.<sup>133</sup> Though nowhere defined precisely, types of *kishuf* are differentiated in the Bible itself, with the more serious forms (witchcraft, conjuring death) considered capital crimes, and well developed in rabbinic literature.<sup>134</sup> In one of his strongest statements contra Ibn Adret, Abba-Mari writes to him

<sup>132</sup> MQp 5, p. 32 / MQd 23, pp. 319-320, ll. 117-122.

<sup>133</sup> Abba-Mari writes to Ibn Adret: “There is no doubt that this [Sign] is idolatry (*‘avodah zarah*)...If it is your judgment to permit the small Sign that is in this book, permit all of them, since all kinds belong to the same class, and all are forms of effigy (*‘ov*),” MQp 1, p. 22 / MQd 19, p. 275, ll. 72-73. See also Chapter 3, where the particulars of the Sign of the Lion are discussed in the context of the popularity of such cures.

<sup>134</sup> Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Leviticus 19:26, 19:31. and 20:27; Exodus 22:17. The talmudic discussion is in Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:4 and 7:11 and Sanhedrin 65b. The rabbinic attitude towards *kishuf* (sorcery) is nevertheless nonsystematic; the Talmud does not explicitly define sorcery, but differentiates between *kishuf* that is a capital crime (such as the *‘ov* and *yide‘oni*, mentioned in Lev. 20:27) and that which is serious and impermissible for its potential danger, but nevertheless not punishable in the same manner: see the

that he believes that the use of medical talismans constitutes sorcery and is forbidden.<sup>135</sup>

Specifically, Abba-Mari considered the use of astrological power in medicine to contravene a number of halakhic prohibitions relating to magic, as Dov Schwartz points out: “Taking an extreme traditionalist approach, Abba Mari...categorized astral magic as a violation of three negative precepts: *me'onen* (soothsayer), *menahesh* (diviner) and *mekhashef* (sorcerer).”<sup>136</sup> Abba-Mari suggests, further, that this inherently constitutes a weakness of faith: “if we permit all of these Signs, then no one will seek God, preferring physicians.”<sup>137</sup> This contention, like the accusation of *avodah zarah*, quickly dissipated as the discussion turned from astrological talismans to allegorical readings of scripture, but reverberated in the use of sorcery to indicate wrongdoing on the part of allegorizers. For instance, Abba-Mari refers to Levi b. Abraham's book, most likely *Livyat Hen*, as being “like the books of sorcery.”<sup>138</sup> Ibn Adret may not have agreed with Abba-Mari's position on the medical use of astral magic, but he was comfortable consigning allegorical interpretation of scripture to the category of books of sorcery: he writes to Crescas Vidal, “Keep us updated on the essentials of the slander that is spreading across the nation, considering that writers of slander are

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discussion in Sanhedrin 67a-67b, in reference to Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:11. See Haim Hermann Cohn in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Sorcery,” 19:27-28.

<sup>135</sup> MQp 5, p. 33 / MQd 23, pp. 320-321, l. 134-139. This statement is couched in the utmost terms of respect and is preceded by a flurry of deference (ll. 113-123), but nevertheless represents a lengthy halakhic argument that opposes Ibn Adret's view.

<sup>136</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Studies in Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 135-136.

<sup>137</sup> MQp 1, p. 22 / MQd 19, p. 274, ll. 63-67.

<sup>138</sup> MQp 12, p. 46 / MQd 30, p. 365, ll. 4-5. The book in question is likely *Livyat Hen* and not *Battei ha-Nefesh*, since Crescas reports difficulty acquiring Levi's book, and *Battei ha-Nefesh* was completed by 1276 while Levi was still revising *Livyat Hen* in 1304. On the composition of Levi's two encyclopedic works, see Chapter 5.

to be found there. And if there is any heretic (*min*) there who writes books, they are fit to be burned as books of sorcery.”<sup>139</sup> By connecting the clearly prohibited *kishuf* and *‘avodah zarah* with the activities of their opponents, ban proponents sought to delegitimize them and stress their transgressive nature.

#### POTENTIAL AND ACTUAL TRANSGRESSION

While the solid consensus among ban proponents on *‘iqqarim* gives way to a divergence in views on how to regard challenges to these *‘iqqarim*, the debate and its proposed solution, the ban, focuses on potential transgression as the immediate threat to the community. This means that transgressive ideas are not wholly intolerable; however, they must be contained so as not corrupt and contaminate the minds of the susceptible.<sup>140</sup> This is evident in one of Abba-Mari’s typical, slogan-based remarks about his opponents in Montpellier: “Their stupidity (*sikhlut*) and heresy (*kefirah*) reached the point that they made of Abraham and Sarah Matter and Form.”<sup>141</sup> These two denunciations are causally linked: the improperly trained mind is subverted by falsity. Stupidity in this sense is more than just blameless ignorance or simplicity; the rationalists’ *sikhlut* is malicious because it threatens undereducated commoners, the very people who were the focus of the traditionalists’ concern. Perhaps for this reason Abba-Mari termed his opponents, in one place,

<sup>139</sup> MQp 10, p. 45 / MQd 28, p. 361, ll. 31-32.

<sup>140</sup> In Abba-Mari’s discussion of Abraham in Chapter 12 of his introductory theological treatise, he presents Abraham as doing precisely the inverse of this: using the divine mandate to leave his native land as an opportunity to spread correct, monotheistic belief among peoples.

<sup>141</sup> “עד שהגיע בהם סכלות והכפירה שעשו מאברהם ושרה חומר וצורה,” MQp Introduction, p. 3 / MQd Introduction, p. 226, ll. 14-15.

*adat ha-morim*, “the teachers’ faction” (punning upon the biblical use of *morim* as rebels):<sup>142</sup> those who taught, or were in favor of teaching, allegorical interpretation and other dangerous and purposely esoteric hermeneutics, to the uninitiated and unready.<sup>143</sup> It thus appears meaningful that *sikhlut* is juxtaposed with *kefirah*, which denotes here a purposeful denial of the true nature of the patriarchs and matriarchs as founders of the Jewish nation. In this statement *kefirah* clearly expresses denial of truth in a manner that is out-of-bounds, but not in a way that renders the persons in question outright *koferim*. They may preach transgressive ideas, but they are not exactly transgressors—nor would they have been under the terms of the Barcelona ban and proposed Occitan bans, which would merely prohibit them from teaching such ideas publicly.

Even as he charged his opponents with removing the yoke of Torah, Abba-Mari was careful to emphasize the potentiality of their misconduct as opposed to their status as outright transgressors. As Abba-Mari explains to Ibn Adret in his initial letter:

Nowadays those who transgress boundaries have multiplied, those weary of tradition grow tired of the admonisher at the gates;<sup>144</sup> they grasp onto the prayers but lay down the principles, abrogating the covenant, studying Torah only occasionally,<sup>145</sup> mocking others by means of the children of foreigners, misplacing the treasures of the Torah, allegorizing by

<sup>142</sup> Numbers 20:10, “שָׁמְעוּ-נָא הַמֹּרִים,” “Hear, o rebels,” from the episode in which Moses brings forth water from the rock in front of the skeptical assembly of Israel.

<sup>143</sup> MQp 5, p. 31 / MQp 33, p. 314, l. 41. There are no textual variants for “כת המורים” although Dimitrovsky suggests its *meaning* should be read as “מורדים” (see his note to l. 41).

<sup>144</sup> On the basis of Amos 5:10, addressing the unrighteous: “שָׂנְאוּ בִשְׁעַר, מוֹכִיחַ וְדֹבֵר תְּמִים יִתְעַבֵּר” (“They hate the arbiter at the gate, and detest him whose plea is just”). The need for an “arbiter at the gates” is a common refrain among the traditionalists, one of their catchphrases.

<sup>145</sup> On the basis of Yerushalmi Berakhot 9:5 (68a), רבי חלקיה בשם רבי סימון העושה תורתו עתים הרי זה מיפר, (“R. Ḥaliqiah said in the name of R. Simon, he who only studies Torah occasionally, indeed this is an abrogation of the covenant. For what reason? [He reads Ps. 119:128,] “They who act on occasion abrogate Your law”).

means of erroneous tales. They constructed from these tales several books, including those suffused with logic—at their behest I’ve seen people buried under physics.<sup>146</sup>

They made the books of Ibn Rushd their touchstone, and established their foundational pole in the treatises of Aristotle. A few were caught in their nets and stumbled into the snare and placed their legs in irons, making the heavenly body, which is uncreated and eternal, the object of their study.<sup>147</sup>

While such rationalists transgress boundaries, allegorize inappropriately, and make a mockery of the Torah, Abba-Mari is careful to emphasize that their mistake is one of degree, not kind. Defenders of open access to philosophy may indulge their inappropriate interest in worldly knowledge, but they still “grasp onto the prayers.” Those same men who “abrogate the covenant” nevertheless make time to turn their thoughts to Torah occasionally. Though they may put more trust in the works of the Philosopher and the Commentator, only “a few” were actually led astray, succumbing to their intellectual quest to prove the eternity of the world.

Behind Abba-Mari’s careful stance lies the notion that certain ideas possess agency, effecting actual transgression. What would such actualized transgression look like? One answer is given by Bonafos Vidal, who accuses some of the rationalists of being lax in their observance of *mizvot*:

We’ve heard the whispers of many, terror all around,<sup>148</sup> that in this generation there are those who make light of the Torah and the commandments. Among the transgressions of these people are [the mixing of] meat and milk.<sup>149</sup> They make the everyday into the holy, [forgetting] *sukkah* and *lulav*, *tzitzit* and *tefillin*. *Shemittah* and the jubilee year they consider

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<sup>146</sup> This appears to me to be a pun in the Hebrew, as well.

<sup>147</sup> MQp 1, p. 20 / MQd 19, p. 272, ll. 32–36.

<sup>148</sup> Based on Jeremiah 20:10, in which Jeremiah faces a hostile crowd while prophesying.

<sup>149</sup> Dimitrovksy reads this as a criticism of what the Rationalists’ allegorical interpretations may lead to, rather than a criticism of the actions of the Rationalists themselves. See his note to l. 14, p. 263.

nonsense. Signs and miracles are rotting reeds and rushes<sup>150</sup> to them, as is the falling of manna and the parting of Red Sea. These people were not bothered about the blood on the lintels; they did not remember the great voice that went on no more,<sup>151</sup> and conducted themselves like partial judges<sup>152</sup> and [yet] guardians of the threshold. They said that there is no basis for *sha'atnez* and [forbidden] mixtures: there is no Torah from Sinai.<sup>153</sup>

Bonafos asserts the actual antinomian behavior results from misguided rationalism. Whereas Abba-Mari emphasizes that most rationalists did not actually transgress, Bonafos depicts a situation in which the potential within heretical ideas is actualized in the form of transgressing commandments. The logical end of disbelief in revelation must be ignoring illogical laws, such as forbidding *sha'atnez*. Bonafos' fears give voice to a post-rationalist world in which ideational transgression is normalized: in which Jewish law is abrogated in favor of Aristotelian logic. In his letter of support for the ban, Abraham b. Joseph b. Abraham Barukh b. Nuriah of Aix describes the similar dangers he sees in philosophy:

Although they [the residents of this land, Occitania] were distinguished in their knowledge of halakhah, section by section, instigators arose, saying, "Tell us, what is the ultimate benefit of the Gemara?" ...There are those who say in reply, 'All the words of the Talmud are, in our view, considered to have no more authority than foreign wisdom.' They have departed from the words of the ancients, the foundations of generations and bedrock; they interpreted them according to their will, considering believers to be quite the opposite, in their view, as though they were not [believers] at all. From either their mouths or their writings, there is nothing good to be found. They deny that miracles exist categorically; they lean away from the straight path, these insignificant and fatuous men.<sup>154</sup> All their

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<sup>150</sup> Based on Isaiah 19:6.

<sup>151</sup> Based on Deuteronomy 5:19, Moses' description of God's voice giving the Ten Commandments.

<sup>152</sup> Based on 'Avot 1:8.

<sup>153</sup> MQp 11, p. 46 / MQd 29, p. 363, ll. 13-19.

<sup>154</sup> In modern literature the term "קלי עולם" has come to indicate one who neglects the observance of *mizvot*, but as it appears in rabbinic literature, the phrase is simply juxtaposed to "גדולי עולם." The rabbinic discussion occurs in the context of 1 Sam. 12:8-11 and is recorded in parallel in Rosh ha-Shannah 25b, Yerushalmi Rosh ha-Shannah 2:8 (14a), and Tosefta Rosh ha-Shannah 1:17.



words hit at the center, while the voice of the opposition circles the periphery.<sup>155</sup> Line and area, objective and subjective, essence and accident—in their minds, these concepts plant in them a divine consciousness. They shouted them at every street corner, letting their voices rise to the heavens concerning the Work of the Chariot and the Work of Creation, the sight of the [burning] bush and [Jacob's] ladder. They become breathless from venting their newfound discoveries which they believe they've uncovered, leading a few astray when they misunderstand the intent of those [sages] who say that these matters should not be spoken of or written down. They do not bother to keep such matters under wrap, rendering their souls guilty. They walk about in darkness; they pull school children out of the classroom with ropes of vanity. We would be left with the nonsense they talk about, with their strange work and foreign deeds that have left their intellect weakened, [like] an altar too small to receive an offering. They asked for nourishment, but wanted to be carefully fed intrigue.<sup>156</sup> Before their belly could fill up with bread and meat, they entered the orchard as if a stamp of approval had been issued into their very hands.<sup>157</sup> The import of this: "Torah will be forgotten in Israel."<sup>158</sup>

Abraham of Aix's argument alludes to the story of the four who entered the orchard, arguing that rationalists not only mistook themselves for men fit to receive secret teachings, but also saw fit to teach them to others in contravention of the master-to-pupil path prescribed by rabbinic tradition. The result was widespread confusion, transgression of the commandments, and the devaluation of the Talmud. Instead of concentrating on the mainstay of Jewish education, the masses, aroused by the glittering splendors of mystical doctrines and Greek logic, would dedicate their intellectual efforts to "Plato and Aristotle, without so much as their commanding prayers or entreaties," as Ibn Adret bitterly wrote.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Abraham's appropriation of the rationalist neologism "מרכז" and the mathematical term "עגלה" to make the metaphor is both mocking and pointed: he is demonstrating his knowledge of that which he opposes.

<sup>156</sup> "להאכיל בשתי ידים" concerns the feeding of infants; see Yoma 77b.

<sup>157</sup> MQp 44, pp. 97-98 / MQd 63, pp. 552-554, ll. 17-34.

<sup>158</sup> MQp 44, p. 98 / MQd 63, p. 554, l. 37.

<sup>159</sup> MQp 5, p. 31 / MQd 23, p. 316, ll. 73-74.

There are indications that Ibn Adret was prepared to go further and to consider possessing false beliefs as inherently transgressive, no different than the nonobservance and antinomian acts detailed by Bonafos Vidal, Abraham of Aix, and others. However, he curtailed his stance and accepted the political exigency of differentiating between transgression and the potentially transgressive. Ideologically, however, Ibn Adret was of a different mindset altogether, as Moshe Halbertal has pointed out:

While the Rashba did formulate the ban in terms that were acceptable to the supporters of philosophy, he was not prepared to lend the ban the interpretation that Abba Mari lent it. The Rashba's rhetoric, in several of his letters, teaches us that he did not try to restrict the philosophical vision of the chariot to its desired boundaries as an esoteric doctrine, but rather saw the ban as first step toward the expulsion of this daughter of the foreign god from the congregation of Israel...Abba-Mari sees esotericism as a safeguard, whereas the Rashba sees it as a means of suppression.<sup>160</sup>

Ibn Adret believed that methodology of philosophy was a corruptive force, and for this reason should preferably not be learned—even for the express purpose of refuting untruths. For example, he writes to Crescas Vidal regarding Levi b. Abraham (cited in part above):

If you argue that his intent is nothing other than refuting the gentile heretic who speaks against our Torah, if it were permitted for him to learn from [the heretic], he will neither be for us nor for our adversary.<sup>161</sup> For what could he learn from him<sup>162</sup> in response to the heretic, who shows him evidence and examples for rendering the signs and miracles that were done for our forefathers in the desert? Isn't seeking to know the supernatural [in

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<sup>160</sup> Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications* (Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 2007), 128.

<sup>161</sup> This appears to be a misunderstanding of Crescas' argument, in which he suggests that perhaps Samuel ha-Sulami agreed to board Levi in order to better understand Levi's views and refute any heretical ones. Ibn Adret responds as though Crescas had argued that *Levi* had acquired heretical ideas in the course of studying to refute Christians ("אפיקורוס הנכרי"). See Crescas' defense of ha-Sulami in MQp 12, p. 47 / MQd 30, p. 368, ll. 50-51.

<sup>162</sup> The antecedents of these pronouns are unclear.

order] to philosophize, like that which crumbles and breaks when poked with a fingernail?<sup>163</sup>

It is not that that studying philosophy will lead one to convert to Christianity—rather, such a person “will be neither for us nor for our adversary.” What it will do is break down faith in the actuality of miracles, weakening the individual until, like a desiccated lung that can be crumbled with a fingernail, it renders the entire animal unkosher. For Ibn Adret, transgressive ideas lead inevitably to transgressive acts, and thereby may be considered akin to active transgression, in distinction to the views of the more moderate ban proponents, who differentiated between potential and actual transgression. In this position he would find an ally in Asher b. Yeḥiel, who, as discussed in Chapter 3, forthrightly stated that he considered the study of philosophy prohibited in general, and supported the ban only as a matter of political efficacy.

#### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF IDEATIONAL TRANSGRESSION

In the writings of ban proponents preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, ideational transgression is understood as the complex of incorrect beliefs interfacing with potentially transgressive behaviors. Despite dotting their rhetoric with rabbinic terms relating to ideational transgression, ban proponents never explicitly define this concept—because they did not understand it to require a precise delineation. They were more interested in enacting a practical measure to keep transgression at bay: threatening with excommunication those who undertook the concrete action of studying or teaching philosophy, thereby circumventing the issue of how to define a transgressor

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<sup>163</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, pp. 380-381, ll. 86-91. The phrase “בצפורן נפרך ונשבר” is taken from Ḥullin 46b, from a passage discussing the determination of whether an animal is kosher by examining the dryness of its lungs.

so as to punish him. This tactic, pragmatic though it may be, is founded on two central assumptions. First, ban proponents assumed that rationalist methodology, especially allegory, was sufficiently powerful in explaining passages of Midrash that contradicted sense or to harmonize the narratives of Genesis with the Aristotelian account of the natural world, that it could lead untrained minds to believe that the patriarchs never existed and that midrashic hermeneutic was of little value. Second, ban proponents shared an assumption that belief and behavior are integrally linked: incorrect beliefs lead, if not inexorably than in all likelihood, to wrongful acts, and transgressive behavior must indicate a person's ignorance of truth. Ideational transgression was thus a risk for anyone who placed undue emphasis on the power of the human mind to decode the meaning of scripture. Providing free access to philosophy was enabling of transgression—it was placing stumbling-blocks before the blind. This real, if undefined, danger called for action, and the action proposed was shaped by rabbinic principles much more so than Maimonidean ones.

Despite Maimonides' great project of identifying the theoretical basis of rabbinic Judaism, ban proponents did not make use of his exposition of correct and transgressive beliefs or otherwise develop terminology into a halakhic means of confronting ideational transgression. Even as they identified particular ideas as insidious to Judaism, encapsulating them in their intentionally sensationalist slogans, ban proponents never formally banned such ideas or those who held them, as occurred in the University of Paris condemnations.<sup>164</sup> They did not need to: the ideas singled out

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<sup>164</sup> J. M. M. H. Thijssen, "What Really Happened on 7 March 1277? Bishop Tempier's Condemnation and Its Institutional Context," In *Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Science: Studies on the Occasion of John E. Murdoch's Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Edith Sylla and Michael McVaugh, 84-114 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 106-114 and "1277 Revisited: A New Interpretation of the Doctrinal Investigations of Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome," *Vivarium* 34 (1997): 1-29; J. Aertsen, K. Emery, and A. Speer, ed., *After*

for censure by the ban proponents were universally regarded as unacceptable among Jewish intellectuals.<sup>165</sup> These were ideas that even the most ardent of ban opponents would have found easy to condemn. The halakhic response to such ideas was not to assign them to punishable categories, but to restrict access to them. The age limit was a tactic in the ban proponents' arsenal, a pragmatic means of curtailing the transgression they feared.

The ban also served as a means for its proponents to moderate their anti-rationalist stance in a culture that was accustomed to philosophical study. Jacob b. Makhir picked up on the proponents' critique of rationalist methodology implicit in the restriction and argued that it could only lead to the conclusion that philosophy was wholly impermissible. Writing to Ibn Adret, Ben Makhir baldly points out, "I've thought over your opinion and it's clear to me that your intention is to render it [philosophy] entirely absent, so that it is not read anywhere."<sup>166</sup> What Ben Makhir is stating here is the subtext of the traditionalists' activities, including those proponents who harbored reservations about enacting the ban: if rationalism is dangerous to young men, then it is dangerous to all men. This observation is as powerful as it is obvious. It cuts to the heart of traditionalist discomfort with "external wisdom": the suspicion that such knowledge would lead to

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*the Condemnation of 1277: Philosophy and Theology at the University of Paris in the Last Quarter of the Thirteenth Century: Studies and Texts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000); and Mark D. Jordan, "The Controversy of the Correctoria and the Limits of Metaphysics," *Speculum* 57, no. 2 (1982): 292-314.

<sup>165</sup> For example, when the ban proponents accused their opponents of denying the historicity of the patriarchs, ban opponents did not defend the idea that Abraham did not exist as an actual human being. Rather, rationalists defended the legitimacy of an allegorical reading of Abraham that added significance to the story of the actual man Abraham. No one with any sense, argued the opponents, would imagine that allegorical interpretation suggests that Abraham did not exist. In other words, the idea and substance of a Jewish creed was relatively unimportant to the controversy because it was accepted by both proponents and opponents.

<sup>166</sup> MQp 38, p. 85 /MQd 59, p. 508, ll. 24-26.

diminished ritual observance by undermining the ideas that supported Jewish ritual life, as well as the authority of halakhic decisors. Ben Makhir saw through this tactic to the greater purpose: to return Occitan intellectual culture to a traditional talmudic curriculum, while diffusing the danger inherent in philosophy and circumventing the thorny task of defining and addressing ideational transgression halakhically.

Significantly, transgression is never discussed by ban proponents as a state of being, as an essential property of the transgressor. Ideational transgression is not a failing of the soul so much as of the mind and perhaps the body, with their multitude of desires and potential faults. Both Schechter and Urbach, in their analyses of rabbinic theological principles, consider ideational transgression as a kind of rebelliousness toward God.<sup>167</sup> Ideational transgression is a subset of various offenses that include murder, adultery, public blasphemy, and other such concrete transgressions. Ban proponents follow this rabbinic principle, as does Maimonides: his explicit discussion of ideational transgression in the *Mishneh Torah* is placed in *Sefer ha-Madda'*, i.e. within his theological overview of halakhah, under *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, laws of repentance for wrongdoing of all kinds.<sup>168</sup> While there are indications that ideational transgression is different in kind from other types of transgressions, it is not classed apart from other crimes. If Jews would be wise to remember that gentiles don't abide their own heretics, as Ibn Adret remarks, he still never suggests anything more drastic than curtailing access to books. Nowhere is the Jewish transgressor

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<sup>167</sup> Schechter, *Aspects*, 219-241; Urbach, *The Sages*, 26-27.

<sup>168</sup> Gerald J. Blidstein, "The 'Other' in Maimonidean Law," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 173-194. Ideational transgression is also covered within *Sefer ha-Madda'* due to Maimonides' belief, shared by the fourteenth-century traditionalists, that the root cause of all transgression is ignorance of reality or the inception of false ideas.

threatened with capital punishment, inquest, or excommunication.<sup>169</sup> This derives from the relative lack of interest in ideational transgression on the part of rabbinic literature and its classification as one of a number of other offenses on a broad spectrum of spiritual and actual transgressions. The outsize emotions that the prospect of ideational transgression elicited from Abba-Mari and Ibn Adret did not have distinct, halakhic support in the rabbinic culture around which they wished to erect a barrier, and so their palliative measure of protection recognized the merely potential threat of antinomian behavior and decline of traditional study.

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<sup>169</sup> Rather, excommunication is the penalty for anyone under the age of twenty-five studying philosophy, or anyone teaching it to those under twenty-five, whether they are transgressors or not.

The theoretical discussion surrounding ideational transgression is made actual in the person of Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim, the only individual accused by name of ideational transgression in the course of the controversy. Levi was initially cast by ban proponents as the exemplar of that which they feared, the embodiment of the power of ideas to unravel the fabric of society, but subsequently, after about the midpoint of the communal debate, he goes unmentioned.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the early focus on Levi's impropriety was incidental, a consequence of Crescas Vidal's misunderstanding of his brother's request for information about the public teaching of external philosophy in Perpignan, as briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Crescas apparently mistook Bonafos's request for general information as a query about an individual, which he assumed to refer to Levi; indeed, Levi's surviving works indicate that he wrote and likely taught many of the precise allegorical interpretations that troubled those who supported the institution of a ban. Levi suffered the censure of Ibn Adret and other prominent members of the Barcelona, Perpignan, and Montpellier communities, and he was turned away from his lodgings at a fellow aristocrat's home in Perpignan, whereupon he was taken in by his cousin in Montpellier. However, while Levi became an apt symbol of the type of philosophical learning the ban attempted to prevent, he was never prosecuted, likely insulated by his membership in a respected Occitan family. In fact, in spite of the accusations directed against him, Levi was also defended by many participants in the debate, including proponents of the ban, and his critics often remain ambivalent about his alleged

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<sup>1</sup> The latest mention of Levi occurs in MQp 42, pp. 93-96 / MQd 61, pp. 537-548, Ibn Adret's response to Samuel b. Reuben's defense of Levi, a close relation.



transgressions. Levi's case demonstrates that while esoteric teaching of philosophy was considered to engender a serious threat of ideational transgression, the complexity of developing prosecutory strategies to deal with it rendered such transgression hypothetical.

#### A HERETIC FROM A GOOD FAMILY

One of the most surprising aspects of the accusations against Levi is the fact that he was clearly the scion of a prominent, well-establishment aristocratic family, a fact which bears emphasizing, considering that scholarship has tended to treat him like an outsider and easy scapegoat.<sup>2</sup> Levi is revealed as a member in good standing of the Occitan community not only by the information relayed in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, but in other extant sources as well. Based on prosopographical evidence, it appears that Levi's family originated in the old Occitan cultural corridor of Narbonne-Béziers-Lunel. Levi's father, Abraham b. Ḥayyim de Béziers, was a *payyetaṇ*; four of his *qerovot* were included in the eastern Provençal ("Carpentras") rite in the *'Amidah* of Shabbat Parah.<sup>3</sup> Abraham is also mentioned by Menaḥem ha-Meiri in the preface to *Beit ha-*

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<sup>2</sup> See below.

<sup>3</sup> Two of the four *qerovot* include acrostics: one bears the acrostic "Abraham bar Ḥayyim" and another "Abraham." See Leopold Zunz, *Die Literaturgeschichte der Synagogen Poesie* (Berlin, 1865), 418; Ernest Renan, *Les rabbins français du commencement du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Histoire littéraire de la France, vol. 27 (Paris, 1877), 629; and Heinrich Gross, *Gallia Judaica: dictionnaire géographique de la France d'après les sources rabbiniques* (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897; Reprint, with supplementary material by Simon Schwartzfuchs, Philo Press, 1969), 421. Shabbat Parah is one of the four additional Torah portions (*Arba'ah Parshiyot*) read during Shabbat services in the month preceding Passover. These include Shabbat Sheqalim, Shabbat Zakhōr, and Shabbat ha-Ḥodesh in addition to Shabbat Parah, and are thematically preparatory for the holiday. Shabbat Parah occurs on the Shabbat following Purim.

*Behirah*, where Abraham is referred to as a renowned scholar.<sup>4</sup> Abraham was active in Narbonne in the first half of the thirteenth century and moved his family to Villefranche de Conflent before Levi was born.<sup>5</sup> It is known from Levi's own writing that he was born in that town in the Roussillon, about fifty kilometers west of Perpignan, around the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Ḥayyim, Abraham's father and Levi's grandfather, was also a prominent scholar,<sup>7</sup> but perhaps the most renowned relative of Levi's was his uncle Reuben b. Ḥayyim (d. before 1276), a Talmudist and *payyetan* in Narbonne.<sup>8</sup> Reuben was a teacher of ha-Me'iri, who was a great admirer of his;<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See *בית הבחירה לרבנו מנחם ב"ר שלמה לבית מאיר המכונה המאירי: יוצא לאור בפעם הראשונה עם פתיחתו הכללית*, ועם פירוש המשניות להרמב"ם על פי כתב-יד פארמא, edited by Shemuel Dikman, 20 vols. (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Isra'eli ha-Shalem, 1964). The general preface is not to be confused with ha-Meiri's preface to his commentary on 'Avot, a celebrated part of *Beit ha-Behirah* on account of its *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* that is known as *Magen 'Avot*.

<sup>5</sup> This is assumed based on the fact that Abraham is mentioned by others as being active in Narbonne, but that Levi states that he was born in Conflent.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Renan gives the probable date of Levi's birth as 1245-1250, though he derives this from two questionable sources: Levi's statement that he is young in a work of unknown date, and a description of Levi as elderly in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, which I have not been able to find in the place Renan indicates, MQp 12, pp. 46-47 (this is Crescas Vidal's first letter to Barcelona, quoted at length below); see "Les Rabbins français du commencement du XIVe Siècle," in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 27:430-734 (Paris, 1877), 630-631. Renan's date is the most frequently cited in subsequent scholarship. In contrast, Warren Zev Harvey argues, based on evidence that Levi observed the prohibition on studying metaphysics before age forty, that Levi was born earlier, c. 1235: see "Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche's Controversial Encyclopedia," in *The Medieval Jewish Encyclopedia of Science and Philosophy*, edited by Steven Harvey, 171-188 (Boston: Kluwer, 2000), 181. If W. Z. Harvey is correct, Levi would be precisely the same age as Jacob b. Makhir and Ibn Adret. I am unconvinced that a definitive date of birth can be determined for Levi.

<sup>7</sup> For this reason, Levi is often cited as Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim or even Levi b. Ḥayyim; at times an even longer pedigree is provided for him. There is some confusion over Levi's grandfather's name, which is either Ḥayyim b. Reuben or Ḥayyim b. Abraham. Two Oxford manuscripts (Mss. Mich. 602 and Mich. 63) have *לוי בן אברהם בן חיים בן ראובן* and two Paris manuscripts (Bibliothèque Nationale Mss. héb. 978 and 979) have *לוי בן אברהם בן חיים בן אברהם בן ראובן*.

<sup>8</sup> While Levi does not state that Reuben is his uncle, this is presumed from his relationship with Samuel b. Reuben de Béziers, who took Levi in after he was turned out by Samuel ha-Sulami. It is supported by patronymics: Abraham b. Ḥayyim (Levi's father), Reuben b. Ḥayyim, Samuel b. Reuben.

another of Reuben's pupils was Manoaḥ b. Simon of Narbonne (late thirteenth to first half of the fourteenth century), whose commentary on *Mishneh Torah* and other works were much-cited.<sup>10</sup> Reuben was himself the student of the Occitan great Isaac ha-Kohen (thirteenth century), a disciple of Abraham b. David of Posquières—and an associate of Ibn Adret: Samuel, Reuben's son, would write to Ibn Adret, "I know of my elderly father's admiring love for you, and the love of Solomon [Ibn Adret] the rabbi [for him], like the love for a son of one's old age."<sup>11</sup> In addition, Reuben was the author of two noted works: the *Sefer ha-Tamid*, a liturgical commentary cited by Aaron b. Jacob ha-Kohen of Lunel in his *ʿOrḥot Ḥayyim*, and, probably, a lost philosophical commentary on the aggadic passages of the Talmud.<sup>12</sup> Reuben's son, Samuel, was to become Levi's benefactor, taking him in when the Perpignan aristocrat Samuel ha-Sulami asked him to leave his home.<sup>13</sup> Samuel b. Reuben describes Levi, in a letter to Ibn Adret, as "A member of my family, of the dynasty of my ancestors, flesh of their flesh and bone of their bones"—he seems to be

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<sup>9</sup> Also in the Preface to *Beit ha-Behirah*.

<sup>10</sup> Manoaḥ's *Mishneh Torah* commentary is known as *Sefer ha-Menubab* or *Sefer ha-Manoaḥ* and was cited by Isaac b. Jacob Lattes (fl. mid-fourteenth century) in *Sha'arei Ziyyon*, the first part of his presentation of the oral law, *Kiryat Sefer*; and, later, by Joseph Karo in *Beit Yosef* and also in *Kesef Mishneh*, Karo's commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*.

<sup>11</sup> MQp 41, p. 90 / MQd 60, p. 526, ll. 26-27; cf. Dimitrovsky's reading of this phrase, p. 526, n. 27. Ibn Adret continued to maintain a close connection with the family even after Levi became the target of accusations of heresy—and after seeing Samuel b. Reuben's signature in support of the Montpellier rationalists: see MQp 42, p. 93 / MQd 61, p. 538, ll. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> This commentary, which is not extant, is attributed by Azariah de Rossi to a Reuben b. Ḥayyim; see *Me'or Einayyim*, edited by David Cassel (Vilna, 1864-1866; reprint, Jerusalem: Makor, 1970), 127. This is pointed out by Ernest Renan in *Les rabbins français du commencement du XIVe siècle*, *Histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 27 (Paris, 1877), 631-632.

<sup>13</sup> In *Livyat Hen* Levi calls his cousin Reuben b. Samuel de Béziers "אדוניי," which H. H. Halkin reads as "father-in-law"; if Halkin's reading is correct, then Levi was married to his second cousin, the famed Reuben b. Ḥayyim's granddaughter.

underscoring the excellence of Levi's family background, as well as the relationship between the cousins.<sup>14</sup> Apart from these contemporaries, Levi likely had illustrious ancestors going back to the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup> These well-established and respected relatives gave Levi a sound reputation;<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> MQp 41, p. 91 / MQd 60. P. 532, ll. 100-101.

<sup>15</sup> It is uncertain, but the relative rarity of the names Levi, Reuben, and Ḥayyim may indicate that Levi was related to several prominent Occitans. The two most promising candidate is Abraham b. Ḥayyim (fl. 12<sup>th</sup> century), to whom Abraham Ibn Ezra dedicated his *Sefer ha-Shem* (along with Abraham b. Meir of Bezières and Isaac b. Judah): see *Sepher Haschem: Oder Das Buch über den vierbuchstabigen Namen Gottes*, edited by Gabriel Hirsch Lippman (Fürth, 1834), Heb. Sec. 1A. Other possible relatives include the important early Occitan figure Moses ha-Darshan (fl. first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), who had a brother named Levi; Jacob b. Reuben (c. 1136-c. after 1170), author of an anti-Christian polemic titled *Milḥamot Adonai*; and Levi b. Moses b. Todros (d. c. 1220) and the son of a Narbonne *nasi* who was praised by Judah al-Ḥarizi in the *Taḥkemoni* for his philanthropic activities. David b. Levi (fl. late 13<sup>th</sup>-early 14<sup>th</sup> century), author of the important halakhic work *ha-Mikhtam* and a signatory of some of Ibn Adret's halakhic decisions, was probably not a relation, as he was a contemporary of Levi's, though he moved in the same elite circles in central Occitania as did Levi's confirmed family members.

<sup>16</sup> Though it has not been addressed by subsequent scholarship, Joseph Jacobs and Max Schlessinger conjectured in their article about Levi b. Abraham b. Ḥayyim in the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia* (edited by Isidore Singer *et al.* [New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901-1906], 8:22-24) that Levi was the maternal grandfather of Levi b. Gershom (Rabag; Gersonides); and by Israel Davidson in his 1939 edition of the first book of *Battei ha-Nefesh*, which includes a family tree in the introduction ("The First Book of *Battei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Laḥashim*" [Hebrew], *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry in Jerusalem* 5 [1939]: 3-4). Few details about Gersonides' life are known definitively, and the identity of both of his parents is disputed. For our purposes, it is unimportant whether his father was Gershom b. Solomon of Arles, author of *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, as recorded by Abraham Zacuto in *Sefer Yuhasin* (see H. Filipowski, ed., *Liber Juchasin* [London, 1857], 224a) and repeated by Gedalya Ibn Yahya in his *Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah* (see *Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah* [Venice, 1587], 61a)—or whether his father was the Talmudist Gershom b. Solomon de Béziers, as contended by Charles Touati and Seymour Feldman, *inter alia*, on the basis of details reported by Isaac b. Jacob Lattes in *Kiryat Sefer*: see Charles Touati, *La Pensée Philosophique et Théologique de Gersonide* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1973) and Seymour Feldman, ed., *The Wars of the Lord by Levi Ben Gershom*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984-1999), 3:4-5. Either way, if Levi b. Abraham's daughter was indeed Gersonides' mother, she would have married into a prominent family—although considering Levi's age, this marriage would have taken place before the controversy and would thus not reflect his continued good standing in the community. She also would have named her son for Levi, but before the controversy, as Gersonides was born in 1288.

However, the identity of Gersonides' mother is even more problematic and is the determinant of whether he was related to our Levi. According to Zacuto (and others who followed him), Naḥmanides, not Levi, was Gersonides' maternal grandfather, but this is contradicted by a remark Gersonides himself makes: he quotes his maternal grandfather as Levi ha-Kohen in his comment on Exodus 34:9 (Mantua, 1480; reprint,

their works also demonstrate that Levi's family produced philosophically-oriented works while continuing to write in traditional genres, as was the custom of the Occitan elite classes.

There is some dispute about the date of Levi's death, but all evidence indicates that he was not only Abba-Mari's senior, but also well-established as a scholar and teacher at the time Abba-Mari instigated the controversy.<sup>17</sup> Levi's statements in the introductions and colophons of his works place Levi at Montpellier in 1276,<sup>18</sup> in Arles in 1295,<sup>19</sup> and in Perpignan and then Montpellier in 1304.<sup>20</sup> It was in Perpignan that Levi found board in the home of Samuel ha-Sulami, one of the leading aristocrats of the community. Though ha-Sulami initially defended Levi's reputation against Ibn Adret's assault, he turned Levi out of his home following ha-Sulami's

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Jerusalem, 1967, 114a). Since Gersonides himself is not known to be a *kohen*, this Levi ha-Kohen would have had to be his maternal, rather than paternal, grandfather—thus precluding Nahmanides from being Gersonides' maternal grandfather. Of course, Levi b. Abraham was not known to be a *kohen* either, so it would seem, in the final analysis, that our Levi b. Abraham was not the grandfather of the preeminent and controversial Jewish philosopher of the fourteenth century.

<sup>17</sup> W. Z. Harvey suggests that in 1276, when he completed his first encyclopedia, Levi was over forty, since he wrote explicitly that one should not delve into *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* until attaining that age, following Maimonides and rabbinic precepts: see his "Controversial Encyclopedia," 181. If Harvey is correct, this would make Levi at least sixty-eight in 1304. In any case it is probable that Levi was elderly at the time of the controversy.

<sup>18</sup> According to the colophon of *Battei ha-Nefesh* in Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. héb. 978 (Paris); see W. Z. Harvey, "Controversial Encyclopedia," 171.

<sup>19</sup> The colophon to one of the long versions of *Livyat Hen* records, "This copy was completed in the city of Arles at the end of the year 5055" (Vatican Ms. ebr. 192, fol. 147r). Another long version bears the date 1299, though without a location (Vatican Ms. ebr. 383, fol. 103v).

<sup>20</sup> It is in the latter half of 1304 that Crescas Vidal first reports about Levi's whereabouts there (MQp 12, pp. 46-48 / MQd 30, pp. 365-372), and several other letters, all dating from 1304, mention him. The year 1304, then, is the last date attested for Levi. Though it has often been asserted that Levi is attested at Arles in 1315, I was unable to find a source for this. W. Z. Harvey thinks it is a misreading of the colophon found in Vatican Ms. ebr. 192; see "Controversial Encyclopedia," 171, n. 1.

daughter's illness and death, in the fall of 1304.<sup>21</sup> Ha-Sulami reportedly interpreted the sad event as divine judgment for hosting Levi.<sup>22</sup> Levi then found refuge in the home of his cousin, Samuel b. Reuben de Béziers in Montpellier, the last date and place where he can be located.<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that Levi's itinerancy was due to his negative reputation, but this must remain no more than conjecture considering that this kind of itinerancy is common to many in the period, and especially to teachers (*melamdim*) and sermonizers (*darshanim*). If his position as a teacher for hire and his boarding with ha-Sulami and Samuel b. Reuben may indicate that Levi suffered poverty, nevertheless it appears that he had the aid and even protection of some fellow aristocrats as well as his aristocratic relatives.

#### LEVI'S ENCYCLOPEDIAS: TYPICAL FARE OR SUBVERSIVE MATERIAL?

Two major works by Levi survive, *Battei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Laḥashim* (*Charms and Amulets*) and *Livyat Hen* (*Graceful Garland*), both guides for curious initiates, along with two shorter works, an astrological treatise known as *Sefer ha-Tekhunah* and a poem titled by Levi *be-Hitnazḥluti u-*

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<sup>21</sup> This is described by Abba-Mari in the headnote to MQp 17, p. 55 / MQd 35, p. 395, ll. 1-8.

<sup>22</sup> Ha-Sulami's words do not survive; this is Abba-Mari's report (in the headnote to MQp 17, p. 55 / MQd 35, p. 395, ll. 1-8).

<sup>23</sup> Samuel b. Reuben, the son of Levi's paternal uncle, almost certainly lived in Montpellier. It is commonly assumed that he lived in Béziers, probably due to his name, which, however, is most likely an inherited place-name rather than an indication of where Samuel lived. In his letter to Ibn Adret (MQp 41, pp. 89-93 / MQd 60, pp. 524-537), Samuel b. Reuben constantly references events occurring in Montpellier. The letter is primarily intended as a peacemaking apology for signing with the rationalists—very likely a reference to the missive sent by the Montpellier rationalists to Barcelona (MQp 23, pp. 66-68 / MQd 43, pp. 431-440). Thus it would seem that in the fall of 1304, Levi went to live with Samuel b. Reuben in Montpellier.



*Telunati 'al ha-Zeman (Complaint Against Fate)*.<sup>24</sup> *Battei ha-Nefesh* and *Livyat Hen* are both encyclopedic, after the fashion of textbooks intended for those curious about science and philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, both were popular works, surviving in fifteen and eighteen manuscript copies

<sup>24</sup> Levi's astrological treatise survives in a unique manuscript, Cambridge Ms. Add. 1563.3, ff. 92r-104v. in which it is attributed to "יחבר ר' לוי בר גרשם בעל בתי הנפש והלחשים"; see Stefan C. Reif, ed., *Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library: A Description and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 335-336 (SCR 597). Levi's poem, the incipit of which is "אני מעיר אלי חכם," is often referred to as the *Complaint* due to the headnote, apparently composed by Levi, which appears in manuscript as "בהתנצלותי ותלונתי על הזמן ולהכחיש אין כל חדש הייתי מזומן." This short poem of twenty-four lines is appended to *Battei ha-Nefesh* and has been published in a critical edition by Israel Davidson, along with the first book of *Battei ha-Nefesh*, in "The First Book of *Battei ha-Nefesh*," 40-42.

<sup>25</sup> There are other examples of "textbooks" from the period. *Midrash ha-Hokhmah (Exposition of Wisdom)*, an encyclopedia by Judah b. Solomon ha-Kohen Ibn Malkah of Toledo (b. c. 1215), was originally written in Arabic but translated by Judah himself into Hebrew while at the court of Frederick II in Lombardy. Like Levi's encyclopedias, *Midrash ha-Hokhmah* encompasses natural philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, and metaphysics (which constitute each of its three parts). It was quite popular, judging from the twenty extant manuscripts. On this work, see Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 250-255; and Resianne Fontaine, "Judah Ben Solomon Ha-Cohen's *Midrash Ha-Hokhmah*: Its Sources and Use of Sources" and Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Some Remarks on Judah ben Solomon Ha-Cohen and his Encyclopedia, *Midrash ha-Hokhmah*," both in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, edited by Steven Harvey (Boston and Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 191-210 and 371-389, respectively. Gershon b. Solomon of Arles (fl. second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), mentioned in n. in connection with Gersonides, wrote a similar encyclopedia, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim (Gateway to the Heavens)*, which Steven Harvey has called "the most popular thirteenth-century encyclopaedia" (see his "Shem-Tov Falaquera, A Paragon of an Epigone," in *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 [2007-2008]: 61-74). Like *Midrash ha-Hokhmah*, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* is comprised of three parts, one on natural philosophy, one on mathematics and astronomy, and one on metaphysics. On this work, see James T. Robinson, "Gershon b. Solomon's *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim*: Its Sources and Use of Sources," in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias*, 248-274. Perhaps best known today are the popularizing works of Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera. His major work is the encyclopedia *De'ot ha-Filosofim*, which has never been published in its entirety from the two extant manuscripts, Biblioteca Palatina Ms. Parm. 3156 (Parma) and Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden Ms. Or. 4758/3 (Leiden). A description is found in Steven Harvey, "Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera's *De'ot Ha-Filosofim*: Its Sources and Use of Sources," in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias*, 211-247. Ibn Falaquera produced two more "little encyclopedias," as Sirat terms them (*History of Jewish Philosophy*, 234): *Reshit Hokhmah (The Beginning of Wisdom)* and *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh (The Book of the Seeker)*; see Moritz David, ed., ראשית חכמה (Berlin, 1902) and ספר המבקש (Krakow, 1646; The Hague, 1778). The first part of *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh* is translated into English by Herschel Levine as *Book of the Seeker: Sefer Ha-Mevaqqesh by Shem Tov Ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976). Both works are extant in a large number of manuscripts—*Reshit Hokhmah* in seven, as well as one Latin translation, and *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh* in nine—attesting to their popularity. Ibn Falaquera's *Iggeret ha-Vikkuah (Epistle of Debate)* is also a guidebook for young students interested in philosophy; it too is well-preserved (extant in seventeen manuscript copies) and has been published by Steven Harvey as *Falaquera's*

respectively; *Battei ha-Nefesh* garnered several commentaries in the fourteenth century, one by Frat Maimon, the leader of a circle of philosophical study in post-expulsion Occitania, as well as a long and short anonymous commentary.<sup>26</sup> *Battei ha-Nefesh*, Levi's first work, is comprised of ten treatises (*ma'amarim*) written in rhymed prose that cover a range of topics at the heart of the rationalist enterprise: ethics, logic, creation, psychology (i.e., the properties of the soul), prophecy, mysticism, mathematics, astronomy, physics, and metaphysics, the soul, prophecy, mathematics, astronomy and astrology (presented in the order given).<sup>27</sup> Levi records that he completed *Battei ha-*

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*"Epistle of the Debate": An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). In addition, one of Yedayah ha-Penini Bedarshi's youthful works—written at the age of seventeen, he states—was an ethical work in encyclopedic format, titled *Sefer ha-Pardes* (*Book of the Orchard*), published by J. Luzzato in *Ozar ha-Šifrut* 3, no. 6 (1889/90): 1-17. This makes the composition date of *Sefer ha-Pardes* almost exactly contemporaneous to that of Levi's *Battei ha-Nefesh*.

<sup>26</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. héb. 981 includes a commentary by one "Solomon" (mentioned on fol. 75v), who has been identified with Frat Maimon, whose Hebrew name was Solomon b. Menaḥem. Sections of this commentary have been published by Kreisel: on Treatise 3 of *Battei ha-Nefesh*, in *Livyat Hen* (2004), 425-434, and on Treatise 5, in *Livyat Hen* (2007), 951-965. A long and short anonymous commentary is to be found, following each stanza, in Russian National Library Ms. Evr. I 463 (St. Petersburg); Vatican Ms. Urbinati ebr. 43 (Vatican City); Bibliothèque Nationale Mss. héb. 978, 979, and 990 (Paris); Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek Ms. hebr. 200 (Vienna); and Bodleian Library Ms. Mich. 63 (Oxford). Kreisel published the long and short versions of the anonymous comments on Treatise 3 of *Battei ha-Nefesh* in *Livyat Hen* (2004), 425-434, 450-454; and on Treatise 5 in *Livyat Hen* (2007), 911-946, 966-970. Several manuscripts also bear marginal comments, dating from as early as the fourteenth century, and Ms. Biblioteca Palatina Ms. Parm. 3589 (Parma), a fourteenth-century manuscript, includes extensive marginalia that incorporates parts of the anonymous commentary. This places the composition date of the anonymous commentary in the fourteenth century.

<sup>27</sup> The Hebrew terminology that Levi uses to title the treatises that make up *Battei ha-Nefesh* reflect his knowledge of the rationalist tradition: תיקון מידות הנפש, מיני ההיקש, מעשה בראשית, הנפש וכוחותיה, נבואה, חכמת האלוהות, חכמת הטבע, חכמת המשפט, מספר ומידות, תכונה ומשפט, *Battei ha-Nefesh* survives in fifteen manuscript copies (one contains extracts while another includes only the seventh treatise). Israel Davidson published various sections of this work: the text of Levi's Introduction appears in "L'introduction de Lévi ben Abraham a son Encyclopédie Poétique *Baté Ha-Néfeš Weba-Lebašim*," *Revue des études juives* 105 (1940): 80-94; the first section of *Battei ha-Nefesh*, along with an anonymous commentary, appears in "The First Book of *Battei ha-Nefesh*, 2-42; and the seventh section of the work in his article "Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim: A Mathematician of the Thirteenth Century," *Scripta Mathematica* 4 (1936): 57-65. More recently, Howard Kreisel published an edition of Treatise 5 of *Battei ha-Nefesh* in *Livyat Hen: The Work of Creation*



*Nefesh* in 1276, in Montpellier.<sup>28</sup> His magnum opus, *Livyat Hen*, on which he worked continually from at least 1295, was a vast expansion of *Battei ha-Nefesh*.<sup>29</sup> The 1295 version is conventionally known as the “short version” while subsequent expansions are termed the “long version,” though this is something of a simplification of *Livyat Hen*’s textual history. The work is divided into two sections, named for the twin bronze pillars in Solomon’s Temple, Jachin and Boaz;<sup>30</sup> Jachin, itself subdivided into at least five treatises, deals with knowledge attained by reason (*ha-muskal*) while Boaz, divided into at least seven treatises, explores knowledge attained through received tradition (*ha-mequbbal*).<sup>31</sup>

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(*Book Six, Part Three*) (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004). The work is monorhymed, all of its lines ending with the syllable ימים.

<sup>28</sup> In the colophon to Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. héb. 978 (Paris); see W. Z. Harvey, “Controversial Encyclopedia,” 171.

<sup>29</sup> The colophon found in Vatican Ms. ebr. 192, f. 147r, records that the work was completed in Arles in 5055 (1295); see Colette Sirat, “Les Différentes versions du *Livyat Hen* de Lévi b. Abraham,” *Revue des études juives* 122 (1963): 167–168. This must not have been the first version of *Livyat Hen*, since Levi notes in this same colophon that he has made substantial revisions to the work, and requests of those in possession of earlier versions to replace them with the revised edition. See W. Z. Harvey, “Controversial Encyclopedia,” 173–174 and Gad Freudenthal, “Sur la partie astronomique du *Livyat Hen* de Lévi ben Abraham ben Hayyim,” *Revue des études juives* 148 (1989): 106.

<sup>30</sup> Described in 1 Kings 7:15–22.

<sup>31</sup> Each of the treatises (*ma’amarim*) that comprise the two central “pillars” (*‘ammudim*) is itself subdivided into parts (*halaqim*) and then again into chapters (*peraqim*), although, as W. Z. Harvey points out, the Treatise on Astronomy (Pillar 1, Treatise 3) is further subdivided into sub-chapters (*she’arim*, literally “gates” but here a calque of the Arabic term *bāl*, as pointed out to me by Raymond Scheindlin) and paragraphs (*simanim*). This schema of *pillar: treatise: part: chapter* reflects the magnitude of Levi’s project and has often confused those who cite it. The treatises are numbered consecutively, with Treatises 1 through 5 comprising Pillar 1 and Treatises 6 and 7 comprising Pillar 2, which is known to be incomplete. See Harvey’s his remarks and a helpful schematic of *Livyat Hen*’s known contents in “Controversial Encyclopedia,” 174. The Introduction, Part 1, and Part 3 of Treatise 6 (from the “Boaz” section) of *Livyat Hen* have been issued in a critical edition by Howard Kreisel, including both long and short recensions, as *Livyat Hen: The Work of Creation (Book Six, Part Three)* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004).

Levi is explicit on the purpose of his encyclopedias:

It is the nature of man to desire a summary, and it is useful to him...it should be in accessible language, understandable, clear, and brief...and insomuch as his manner [of learning] is through verse and literary rhetoric, he [such a man] will not be disappointed...I organized these weighty matters in concise and complete, for it is not my intention to merely to provide poetry and parables, but to clarify truths according to my thinking.<sup>32</sup>

He took the title for *Battei ha-Nefesh* from Isaiah 3:20, a passage which describes the adornments of the daughters of Zion; however, Levi states that the title is to be understood according to the decontextualized meaning of the phrase, “stanzas on the soul and the divine secrets”: “I called these stanzas *Battei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Laḥashim* because their purpose is to discuss the true nature of souls (*ʿamitat ha-nefashim*) and the secrets of the Creator (*laḥashei ha-bor’e*) and His holy names, and the mysteries of His prophets (*razei nevi’av*) whom He guides with intention.”<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Levi is both bold, seeking to be more clear and accessible than Maimonides in opening the books of philosophy before the seeker, and cautious, overcoming his initial hesitation due to a dream-vision. First, he writes, after effusive praise of Maimonides and the positive effects of *Moreh ha-Nevukhim/Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn* on intellectual life, “For reasons of caution, he [Maimonides] concealed (*satam*) these matters from the people of his generation...mentioning them only in hints

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and *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah (Book Six, Introduction and Part One)* (Be’er Sheva’: Ben Gurion University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Davidson, “L’Introduction,” 86, ll. 76-80, 89, ll. 116-118.

<sup>33</sup> Davidson, “L’Introduction,” 89, ll. 140-142; cited by W. Z. Harvey in “Controversial Encyclopedia,” 171-172, n. 2. As Davidson points out, *laḥashim* is to be understood according to its rabbinic connotation in Ḥagigah 14a. The verse from Isaiah is perhaps also a literary epithet for physics and metaphysics, or a reference to the talismans that Abba-Mari objected to so vehemently. The same verse served as the title for an ethical work by Levi’s younger contemporary, Estori (Isaac b. Moses) ha-Parḥi (1280-c. 1355), best known for his topographical and halakhic work on the Land of Israel, *Sefer Kaftor va-Feraḥ*.

(*rosh pera'qim*) and referencing them riddles...”<sup>34</sup> He then details the dream in which he was finally emboldened to undertake the work:

Finally the worries of my heart and my perplexity lulled me to sleep, and I saw, there, a man speaking to me...he said to me, “Man, awake and arise and be strengthened in your task, and do not fear; produce what your heart demands and that which your soul is capable of. Do so and you will accomplish [these demands].”<sup>35</sup>

However, Levi clearly felt that his first work was both too small and too opaque to serve his purpose of making philosophy available to the seeker. He began *Livyat Hen* after finishing *Battei ha-Nefesh*, as an expansion of the task begun in the latter.<sup>36</sup> It took Levi nearly twenty years to finish his project, but he began disseminating sections immediately.<sup>37</sup> After finishing the first edition (the 1295 edition was at least the second), Levi remained unsatisfied with his expanded encyclopedia and repeatedly revised it, with the result that several recensions of *Livyat Hen*, all incomplete, survive.<sup>38</sup>

Was anything about these two consummately Occitan rationalist works particularly transgressive? Historians of ideas have characterized the content of *Battei ha-Nefesh* and especially of *Livyat Hen* as “conservative Maimonidean” in terms of theology and “radical” in terms of

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<sup>34</sup> Davidson, “L’Introduction,” 85, ll. 48-50.

<sup>35</sup> Davidson, “L’Introduction,” 87, ll. 83-85.

<sup>36</sup> Recorded in the colophon. The title, which references Levi’s name in the medieval fashion, is lifted from Proverbs 1:9, 4:9. It appears to be a reference to wisdom, due to the association of the *livyat hen* with wisdom in Proverbs as well as in ’Avot 6:7.

<sup>37</sup> This is indicated by Levi’s comments in surviving manuscripts; see Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 245, and above.

<sup>38</sup> See Sirat, “Les Différentes versions,” 167-177, and above.

exegesis of biblical and rabbinic texts.<sup>39</sup> Yitzhak Baer states of *Livyat Hen*, “There is hardly anything in this book which can be construed as heretical.”<sup>40</sup> Levi is, indeed careful to begin each section of allegorical interpretation in *Livyat Hen* by insisting on the coexistence of allegorical and literal readings—although it may be, as Sirat suggests, that his insistence is overshadowed by the fact that “these two or three lines of orthodox declaration are followed by several pages of allegory.”<sup>41</sup> It is true that much of the specific allegories that ban proponents found objectionable is to be found in Levi’s writing, including the figuration of Abraham and Sarah as Form and Matter, the Urim and Tumim as the astrolabe, and the twelve tribes as the twelve signs of the zodiac.<sup>42</sup> However, they are not unique to Levi’s writings, nor did Levi advocate the implications that ban proponents read into these allegories in reductionist fashion, as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>43</sup> Thus it would seem that any ideational transgression found in Levi’s writings was a matter of perception: his detractors’ sense that he was insufficiently pious, too cavalier in interpreting scripture and ’aggadah, overly enamored with the powers of the mind.

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<sup>39</sup> The terminology is W. Z. Harvey’s in “Controversial Encyclopedia,” 177; but see also Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 245–255 and Halkin, 74–75.

<sup>40</sup> Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:292.

<sup>41</sup> Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 245. See also Dov Schwartz’s assessment, in which he calls some of Levi’s allegories “quite radical” (“‘Greek Wisdom’: A Reexamination in the Period of the Controversy over the Study of Philosophy,” *Sinai* 104 [1989]: 148).

<sup>42</sup> These allegories appear in Treatise 6; in the “short version” of *Livyat Hen* preserved in Bodleian Ms. Mich. 519 (Oxford), these allegories occur on ff. 38v, 68v, and 71v, respectively. See Charles Touati, “La controverse de 1303–1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques,” *Revue des études juives* 117 (1968): 30–31.

<sup>43</sup> See Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 246.

## WHY LEVI WAS TARGETED

The accusation against Levi as articulated in the *Minḥat Qena'ot* letters is not absolute: Levi is not an outright transgressor, but his popularization of allegorical readings of scripture and aggrandizement of the role of human in scriptural interpretation is sufficiently dangerous that he is recommended for communal censure. Ibn Adret provides an exposition of the thought behind his recommendation, as detailed below, but what he does not explain is why Levi is singled out among others, including those nameless men who espouse similar views, and who are often invoked by Ibn Adret and others in calling for their public castigation. One theory suggests that Levi was targeted because he was of a lower socio-economic, or perhaps just economic, class. This is the conclusion of A. S. Halkin in his often-cited, exculpatory 1966 article, “Why Was Levi b. Ḥayyim [*sic.*] Hounded?,” in which he follows Leo Baeck’s earlier assessment.<sup>44</sup> There is circumstantial evidence that Levi suffered from a reduction in esteem as an individual; in his *Telunati ‘al ha-Zeman* he remarks about this, “They considered me a foreigner on account of my knowledge; they betrayed me and plotted against me”;<sup>45</sup> and, of course, as an elderly man he had to work, or rely on the charity of family members, in order to have a place to live. It is difficult to know how seriously to take Levi’s complaint, however, considering the well-worn literary genre of complaint poetry. In addition, it is clear that in the medieval period, esteemed members of society were similarly reduced to being hired as instructors and translators for various reasons, perhaps the most famous

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<sup>44</sup> A. S. Halkin, “Why Was Levi ben Ḥayyim Hounded?” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34 (1966): 68-70; Leo Bäck, “Zur Charaktersitik des Levi ben Abraham ben Chajjim,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 44 (1900): 28-30; and see also Charles Touati, “La Controverse de 1303-1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques,” *Revue des études juives* 117 (1968): 21-37.

<sup>45</sup> Davidson, “Introduction to *Batteii ha-Nefesh*,” 40, l. 237.

example being that of Abraham Ibn Ezra. There is evidence that, as a generality, teachers of the young (*melamdim*, a term usually reserved for teachers of children), had a low social standing in medieval Jewish society and were poorly compensated for their work,<sup>46</sup> but it begs credulity to imagine that Levi was targeted because of his occupation and attendant poverty.

In fact, the allegations against him reflect his social standing and level of education: Levi was charged with being an agent of the spread of dangerous ideas, not of attendance at philosophical sermons or lessons. For all his fulminations, Ibn Adret ultimately has little leverage over Levi, a fellow *nikhbad*, and asks him to curtail his activities by invoking the good name of Levi's family:

Decide internally to do as your friends advise you; what you are doing is unbecoming for you and what they say suits you. Please do not take my advice lightly. Go out now and inquire of those who travel between there and here what they hear from those who are talking, and not quietly; after that you'll understand that people are coming to hear your words in order to criticize them, and are gossiping about you, be it truth or lies. Remove this obstacle from before you and your family willingly,<sup>47</sup> and let your deeds and learning be your testaments. Why grieve at that which overturns your nobility?<sup>48</sup>

In view of Levi's demonstrable social prestige, it has been proposed that he was targeted because his encyclopedias were not only intended for popular consumption, but also contained precisely those ideas encapsulated in the slogans of the ban proponents. From the surviving

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<sup>46</sup> See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 25-31; however, most of Kanarfogel's sources pertain to northern Europe specifically, and many to twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

<sup>47</sup> "ברננה" could also be a reference to Levi's belletristic writing.

<sup>48</sup> MQd 16, p. 55 / MQd 34, p. 394395, ll. 66-71.

sections, it appears that Levi's work indeed fit the bill.<sup>49</sup> The question remains, however, whether Levi's work stood out among others for its radical allegoresis. Warren Zev Harvey suggests that it did:

The main reason for his [Levi's] being hounded seems to be his success as a popularizer of philosophy....His books were not esoteric, as is usually the case with philosophy, but avowedly exoteric....As Levi put it, he is giving his readers the background that will enable them to read Maimonides' Guide. Those who were worried about the danger of philosophy had reason to be worried about Levi.<sup>50</sup>

However, it appears that *Battei ha-Nefesh* and *Livyat Hen* were not unique: they competed, as noted above, at the very least with Judah b. Solomon ha-Kohen Ibn Matkah (first half of the thirteenth century)'s *Midrash ha-Hokhmah*, Gershom b. Solomon of Arles (fl. late thirteenth century)' *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, and Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera's *De'ot ha-Filosofim*, all popular works.<sup>51</sup> When ban opponents protested in Montpellier, it was, again, Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim* that they read aloud in defiance of traditionalist sensitivities. While *Livyat Hen* and *Battei ha-Nefesh* were certainly exemplars of the type of book that disturbed ban proponents, Levi was not alone in popularizing such ideas, nor was his work more radical by degree, as noted above.

What is so interesting about Levi's entrance into the discussion preserved in *Minḥat Qena'ot* is that Crescas Vidal, reporting from Perpignan, *assumes* that the inquiry from his brother concerns an individual rather than a movement; moreover, he assumes that the man in question must be Levi. Bonafos Vidal, Crescas' brother, merely asks Crescas:

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>50</sup> W. Z. Harvey, "Controversial Encyclopedia," 179.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 3.

The rabbi Solomon [Ibn Adret], God be with him, pressed me to go on and apprise you of things reaching our ears from those who pass through and return, and also from epistles. It was via letter the he [Ibn Adret] was made aware that there were peoples in the land, from the slopes of [Mount] Amnon inwards,<sup>52</sup> who denigrated the messengers of God and that which is written in the Torah and Prophets. Upon hearing this, he [Ibn Adret] was upset because of these things, and surprised that you were not among those attempting to correct [the problem]. For this reason I'm writing to you, to determine whether these things really and truly came out of the mouths of those who [supposedly] said them. If it is as they [the reporters] say, who are these people—who is their father,<sup>53</sup> where are their chastisers?<sup>54</sup>

Nowhere does Bonafos imply that he has in mind a single individual who is the source of the problem. Not only does he pose the question in the plural—"who are these people?"—but he also seems far more concerned with determining whether or not the rumors heard in Barcelona about some form of extreme allegorizing have any basis in reality. "Who are these people?" may well be a rhetorical question. Moreover, Bonafos seems uncomfortable asking his brother for this information, as though doing so might imply to Crescas that Ibn Adret suspects him of complicity. The warm closing of the letter, more personal than ornamental, suggests a close relationship between the brothers; Bonafos was perhaps more concerned with Crescas' standing in the community than he was with the alleged transgression. While Bonafos' language throughout the letter bespeaks genuine discomfort with potentially transgressive activity in Occitania, he remains skeptical of the information circulating in Barcelona.

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<sup>52</sup> "The land" here is a term referring to Occitania; see Chapter 1. "The slopes of Amnon" constitute the northern boundary of the Land of Israel in the discussion in Gittin 8a; here this may be a reference to Montpellier, a city perched on a mountain, as Dimitrovsky suggests: see his note to l. 28 on p. 364.

<sup>53</sup> Lifted from 1 Samuel 10:12.

<sup>54</sup> MQp 11,p. 46 / MQd 29, p. 364, ll. 25-32.



I would like to suggest that Levi was an incidental target. Crescas did not know of him when he inquired, at the behest of his brother Bonafos, whether any radical preaching was going on in Perpignan. In fact, it appears that Crescas misread Bonafos's letter. Bonafos wrote in generality, about a larger issue facing the community, which Crescas took as a much narrower question about the impropriety of an individual. Once he had asked around, Crescas assumed that, if Bonafos and Ibn Adret were looking for a troublemaker, Levi certainly qualified. In turn, when Ibn Adret was made aware of the particulars of Levi's work, he became incensed and condemned Levi in the harshest terms he could. Levi was exactly the sort of man Ibn Adret was concerned about; he brought Abba-Mari's anxieties to life for Ibn Adret, drawing the discussion away from the halakhic permissibility of medical talismans and towards real conversations occurring between actual people who doubted, or might be led to doubt, basic ideas that undergirded the halakhic system itself. Samuel ha-Sulami was caught by surprise when it turned out that the learned, elderly man from a respected Occitan family, whom he had willingly taken into his home, was accused by Ibn Adret of being a possible transgressor. Even faced with Ibn Adret's vitriol, ha-Sulami sedately assured Ibn Adret of Levi's uprightness.<sup>55</sup> (Later, ha-Sulami would bow to pressure, but this was also under the duress of his daughter's death.) The lack of deference and fear on the part of ha-Sulami in his initial response to Ibn Adret, as well as Crescas' own equivocal report, demonstrates that Levi was not considered out of the mainstream before Crescas pointed the finger at him,

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<sup>55</sup> Ha-Sulami's letter to Ibn Adret is not included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* and does not survive, but ha-Sulami's defense of Levi is clearly indicated by Ibn Adret's response to Ha-Sulami, MQp 17, p. 56 / MQd 35, p. 396-397, ll. 16-25.

somewhat unwittingly. Levi was, unfortunately for him, an excellent choice and quickly came to symbolize the prototype transgressor in the controversy.

Even so, there are indications that Levi did not suffer excessively, another factor that points to the incidental nature of the accusations against him. As detailed below, Ibn Adret corresponded with Levi in terms that, while hostile, accorded Levi basic respect. After ha-Sulami asked Levi to leave, Levi found lodging with his cousin, Samuel b. Reuben de Béziers in Montpellier. Most of his wanderings, then, took place before he was accused of ideational transgression. There is every indication that, for someone whose reputation was tarnished by the leading figure of the times, Levi was able to continue to live more or less as before, never subject to any kind of communal censure or harassment.

Levi may also have been first targeted for, and subsequently spared from, greater public castigation by internal developments within rationalistic Jewish intellectual culture. Whereas the thirteenth century saw the application of rationalistic ideas to traditional exegetical forms, especially verse-by-verse textual commentary and homiletics, Jewish philosophy in the fourteenth century instead applied traditional content to rationalistic methodology, as Colette Sirat has noted. In other words, instead of writing a scriptural commentary incorporating philosophical ideas, fourteenth-century rationalists instead tended towards philosophical treatises incorporating scripture. For instance, Levi b. Gershom's Torah commentary would primarily take the form of *to'alot*, short essays on the meaning of the parashah. Of Yedayah ha-Penini's commentary on *'aggadot* of the Talmud, Sirat says, "They offer philosophical explanations of no great originality...Yedayah's method, however, considerably differs from that of his predecessors; far from

trying to interpret each word or each expression of the text, he inquires into the general sense of the passage and analyses its philosophical signification.”<sup>56</sup> Levi is a transitional figure (and not the only one): his encyclopedias are stand-alone works, not line commentaries, but they are also intended for a general audience, not fellow philosophers. Unlike the approach which Levi cultivated to its utmost, the post-expulsion Occitan rationalists—for all that their *ideas* garnered the label “radical” in so much subsequent commentary upon them—did not wrap Greco-Islamic philosophy “in the cloak of the Scriptures and the Talmud claiming to be the true Judaism.”<sup>57</sup> Instead, fourteenth-century rationalists kept philosophy separated somewhat from traditional forms of scriptural interpretation, whether in treatises or *maḥbarot*. The new generation of Jewish philosophers wrote for an educated audience, mitigating the charges of breach and waylaying the young that plagued teachers, preachers, and writers of textbooks. Sirat suggests that Levi was an ideal scapegoat for yet more illustrious men, including Maimonides and the Tibbonides, precisely because he represents the end of an intellectual epoch, having taken the methodology of the post-Maimonideans to its logical conclusion.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, the younger among the Occitan rationalists at the time of Abba-Mari’s controversy to belong to a different era, one in which new approaches to philosophy were taking hold and in which qabbalah was ascendant in Iberia.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 276.

<sup>57</sup> Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 244.

<sup>58</sup> This is Sirat’s response to the consensus view that Levi was targeted due to his personal poverty, of which she writes, “There is certainly some truth to this hypothesis” (*History of Jewish Philosophy*, 246). However, Sirat argues that Levi’s benign fate was a result of the above changes within philosophical culture and as well as the accessibility that he granted to Maimonides’ plainly radical but eminently reasonable ideas.

<sup>59</sup> Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 247.

CRESCAS VIDAL'S EQUIVOCAL INDICTMENT

Even Levi's detractors display a great deal of ambivalence about his alleged impropriety; for instance, Crescas Vidal's initial report to Ibn Adret about the situation on the ground in Perpignan is surprisingly nuanced and ultimately equivocal. Crescas writes:

Now I'll tell you noble men what I know and what I've heard about the man, Levi, whom we mentioned. Naturally, I saw him in the land of Provence and found that his heart is as great as the sea, that he is knowledgeable in the Talmud and involved in its study. For he learned it [Talmud] from his youth and became cunning,<sup>60</sup> and none could compete with his knowledge and intelligence, except those who knew him and were his peers. When he spoke with a man who he knew was not learned in the Torah of God and in the words of our holy sages, his [Levi's] heart was emboldened and he was able to deceive him without the man discerning whether he was an evildoer or whether his teaching was pious. I attempted many times to get him to show me his book, but he would defer me, saying that he didn't have it with him in his residence.<sup>61</sup>

On the one hand, Crescas readily admits that Levi was a talented Talmud scholar; on the other, he suggests that Levi's sins are all the greater because he committed them knowingly. This type of backhanded compliment accords with the halakhic principle that places more weight on intentional transgression, especially transgression that takes place after receiving a warning—being educated, essentially—rather than acts committed due to ignorance or with lack of intention. It is

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<sup>60</sup> The word ערום, which I have translated as “cunning,” generally carries a negative connotation; it is not just subtleness or cleverness, but cunning used for deception. However, Dimitrovsky suggests that it is here used in the positive sense of subtle, careful speech, citing the rabbinic discussion in Pesahim 3a, which uses Job 15:5, “לְשׁוֹן עָרוּמִים ; וְתִבְחָר, כִּי יִצְלַח עֲוֹנָה פִּיד ;” to argue (paradoxically) for the importance of care and purity of speech in all matters. However, it seems to me that Crescas is making a point about Levi's power of persuasion: he explains that he was able to mislead many precisely because he was learned and clever. This echoes the fear of misuse of knowledge of the Torah particularly by those talented in its study that occurs also in the *Toledot Yesbu*; e.g. in Samuel Krauss, ed., *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; reprint, Hildesheim and New York: G. Olms, 1977). See also David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yesbu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 130-45; Daniel Lasker, “הפולמוס היהודי האנטי-נוצרי לדורותיו,” *Pe'amim* 75 (1998): 94-96; and Moshe Sofer, “הערות על קונטרס 'תולדות ישו' הנוצרי,” *Yerushatenu* 2 (2008): 72-77.

<sup>61</sup> MQp 12, p. 47 / MQd 30, p. 369, ll. 55-62.

particularly grave for someone with a sound Talmudic education to lead others astray: it is a perversion of the tradition. Crescas also implies that Levi knew he was pushing the envelope; that is why Levi claimed that he did not have a copy of his own book on the many occasions that Crescas says he asked.

And yet, Crescas' report is not a strong indictment of Levi. The only firsthand information that Crescas conveys is that he was aware of Levi's reputation as a scholar; that he was impressed with Levi's education; and that Levi seemed to avoid showing him his book. While Crescas' report depicts Levi as a suspicious character, it also defends his background and stresses his scholarly abilities. In fact, Crescas reports that he was surprised when others in Perpignan told him of Levi's improprieties:

Others told me, however, that this Levi destroyed the covenant, making figurations out of the writings on the act of creation.<sup>62</sup> When I reported these things to the scholar ha-Sulami he replied, "This is nothing other than gossip, for I have seen him to be exacting in every fine detail of the text, praying the evening and morning services, and walking in the path of the good and the way of the righteous. If he should be found to be transgressive and guilty in even one of those matters, he will have no monument and name in my house and within my walls."<sup>63</sup> If people should appeal to our lord [ha-Sulami] about this man [Levi], well, you've seen with your own eyes that one person denigrates him while the next person exalts him. Admittedly, I've heard bad things about him—that it is his decision and his practice to teach the books and language of the Chaldeans<sup>64</sup> to anyone who hired him,

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<sup>62</sup> Gregg Stern suggests that צורות is a Hebrew translation of the technical Latin term *Figurae*; I have followed this suggestion in my translation ("The Crisis of Philosophical Allegory in Languedocian-Jewish Culture (1304-6)," in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, edited by J. Whitman, 187-207 [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 195-196).

<sup>63</sup> Though styled as a direct quotation, ha-Sulami's statement is clearly elevated by Crescas for rhetorical purposes, as the high register and density of biblical allusions in it reveal.

<sup>64</sup> In the context of rabbinic literature, "Chaldeans" usually refers to Greeks, but here seems to be more broadly applied. Greek was unknown to Jews outside of the Byzantine sphere, and Levi almost certainly did not know Arabic—there are no indications of such in his work, and almost no rationalists of his generation

because he had fallen on hard times, whether he be an old, elderly man or a fledgling who just left the nest.<sup>65</sup>

Crescas' conclusion is that Levi may conduct himself inappropriately at times, but that he is not a transgressor. Levi may be indiscrete about teaching youth in his desperation to eke out a living, but an upstanding member of the community has vouched for his impeccable religious observance. Crescas emphasizes that popular opinion about Levi is mixed—and as a result, that Levi cannot be conclusively classed as a wrongdoer who has breached the fences.<sup>66</sup>

#### IBN ADRET'S ACCUSATIONS AGAINST LEVI

In contrast to Crescas Vidal, Ibn Adret considers Levi to be a potential transgressor—though only a potential one, thus not one beyond rehabilitation. Ibn Adret baldly replies to Crescas: “Not a few people have told us of about the defects of this man Levi...even if it as he

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did. Crescas probably did not mean that Levi was literally teaching these or any other language to his pupils, but rather that he was teaching Greek and other foreign wisdom via translation.

<sup>65</sup> MQp 12, p. 47-48 / MQd 30, pp. 369-370, ll. 62-70.

<sup>66</sup> Crescas was evidently cautious in his report; consider his treatment of another, unnamed Montpellier rationalist who authored a Torah commentary: “I still have not been able to lay an eye on this book [the Torah commentary], since its author didn't show it to anyone while he was alive. Now his son has decided, after noticing that that the text is blurred and almost unreadable, that it must be copied before it is worn out. There is concern that it will be spread around the land. I don't know whether those who informed our lord [about the rationalists] informed him also about this book, or about the youths whose homilies constitute breaches on the subject of Matter and Form, and whom no one protests against. I heard that the scholar N'Astruc de Lunel [Abba-Mari] already informed you of this and of course my lord knows what he replied in this matter, though I have seen neither the question nor the answer. Indeed, my lord knows that I've neither seen nor heard anything like this in this, our city, where I have established my dwelling, until now, although two or three times I've heard the sermons preached by the philosophizers in the synagogue while I was there and nothing that they emitted from their mouths was wrongful or blameworthy. I can't determine whether they restrained themselves in front of me and they are actually of a different mindset, or if their mouths are equal to their minds” (MQd 12, p. 48 / MQd 30, pp. 370-371, ll. 74-87).

[Samuel ha-Sulami] recently attested, that he [Levi] goes to the synagogue evening and morning, and privately agrees with the precepts of the Torah.”<sup>67</sup> Crescas was apparently not the only person whom Ibn Adret consulted about Levi, and by the time Ibn Adret wrote his reply to Crescas, his mind was made up. Regularly attending to prayer does not a pious man make, Ibn Adret admonishes Crescas. In his following letter, addressed to ha-Sulami, Ibn Adret gives a few more details about the reports he received from others:

Don’t try to claim that this is the slander of secret informers, for it is placed in their mouths<sup>68</sup> and they don’t say it in secret, nor do they whisper it in one’s ear and under concealment. Those who break bread at your table tell of your uprightness and the righteousness of your behavior, yet they insist on this bad situation [with Levi]; in fact, they speak of it with raised voices... Concerning this [the travelers’ reports], excepting [what they say about] your fine reputation, I do not suspect malice in their words, because those who provide the reports come one after the other, more and more of them, and it can be assumed that they [the reporters] do not know one another and come at random times—surely they can’t all be lying.<sup>69</sup>

Even assuming some exaggeration on Ibn Adret’s part, it appears that he was impressed by the consistency and emotionality of the reports he received about Levi. Moreover, the people he spoke with roundly portrayed ha-Sulami himself as an upstanding person, something Ibn Adret already knew and which served to confirm his hunch that these travelers were being honest in their assessments. He accepted their reports that Levi was transgressing communal norms.

The most interesting statement implicit in Ibn Adret’s assessment of Levi, however, is that it is immaterial whether Levi agrees with the words of the Torah in private (*be-seter*), as Ibn Adret

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<sup>67</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, p. 380, ll. 82, 84-85.

<sup>68</sup> I.e., they are compelled to report what they know to be true.

<sup>69</sup> MQp 15, p. 53 / MQd 33, p. 389, ll. 44-50.

wrote to Crescas. If private belief cannot save Levi from suspicion, then, in Ibn Adret's view, the ideational transgressor is not marked by private *disbelief*—at least for the purposes of the community. Ibn Adret echoes this in his letter to Levi: “Why should we descend into controversy that upends regional boundaries just because some man believes whatever his heart desires? Because he comes out publicly, as he wishes, with this heresy and becomes a heretic (*ba'al minut liheyot min*).”<sup>70</sup> Communal conflict is unwarranted over transgressive ideation that is merely private and never disseminated. However, from Ibn Adret's earlier remark (in the letter to Crescas) that punctilious prayer does not absolve Levi of the accusation of transgression, it would seem that Ibn Adret does recognize and esteem the importance of private belief.<sup>71</sup> After all, if acting appropriately—going to synagogue for regular prayer—does not testify to a person's uprightness, then his motivation for and beliefs about performing the action must bear significance. In light of this, it is necessary to distinguish between the pragmatic definition of ideational transgression that Ibn Adret proposes for the purpose of debate, and his evident personal suspicion that a theoretical framework supported ritual acts and moral behavior, without which they could not be properly carried out.

For the purposes of the communal discussion of how to confront ideational transgression, it is thus not private belief (or disbelief) that primarily concerns Ibn Adret, but rather the allegorical interpretation of scripture, in contradiction to the rabbinic interpretation, which is disseminated as scripture's true meaning. It is for this transgression that Ibn Adret levies upon Levi

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<sup>70</sup> MQp 16, p. / MQd 34, p. 391, ll. 19–20.

<sup>71</sup> In MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, p. 380, ll. 82, 84–85. Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer 'Ahavah: Hilkhbot Tefillah* 10:1.



the curse *yimah shemo ve-zikbro*—“may his name and memory be obliterated,” a conventional curse most often applied by medieval Jews to Jesus.<sup>72</sup> Specifically, Ibn Adret charges Levi with popularizing philosophical allegory:

You are a learned man; I saw your pamphlet,<sup>73</sup> which collects honey from the carcass of a lion.<sup>74</sup> You claim that you’ve written good, life-sustaining words. If only it were so...You taught and wrote and interpreted as you saw fit, but after you entered [into Torah study], why did you leave it?<sup>75</sup> Maybe if you applied yourself as you did in the beginning, you would illuminate the eyes of many with Gemara and Mishnah. If you intended to erect a fence around the holy Torah with the words of the philosophers, leave it be, since this approach is forced and idiosyncratic.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, p. 381, ll. 97-99. Specifically, Ibn Adret curses Levi because Levi reportedly taught that Abraham and Sarah rotted away after death, in contradiction to rabbinic traditions as codified in Bava’ Batra’ 17a. However, Ibn Adret addresses this remark about Levi to Crescas Vidal, not Levi himself, whom he approaches with lesser bile. Though he admonishes Levi sternly—“You should wonder why I haven’t yet ascended a steep mountain with a *shofar* strapped to my chest and blasting-trumpets in my hands, shouting in writing and aloud,” Ibn Adret writes to Levi (MQp 16, p. 54 / MQd 34, p. 392, ll. 30-31)—this hardly deserves the sting of “may your name be obliterated.” Ibn Adret also addresses Levi as a fellow aristocrat and a man of intelligence. In fact, this is part of the reason for Ibn Adret’s ire: that Levi should know better.

The conventional curse Ibn Adret levies upon Levi in the letter to Crescas is abbreviated ישיי. It should be emphasized that Ibn Adret says this conditionally: *if* indeed Levi is responsible for what his detractors claim he has done. Compare this to Ibn Adret’s harsh words about a convert to Christianity, whom he identifies only by the rabbinic epithet of anonymity, “Ploni,” in his letter to Samuel ha-Sulami. There Ibn Adret wishes death upon Ploni and his son for attempting to subvert Jews. See MQp 17, p. 56 / MQd 35, p. 398, ll. 45-52. (“Ploni” here could not refer to Abner of Burgos, who converted c. 1320. However, Ibn Adret certainly seems to have a particular individual in mind.)

<sup>73</sup> “קונדרסיד” could be a reference either to Levi’s apologetic letter to Ibn Adret, or to writings of his that had circulated; it would seem to be the former, considering that Ibn Adret bases his opinion on reports he has heard from travelers, rather than Levi’s philosophical writing.

<sup>74</sup> An allusion to the story of Samson and the lion, told in Judges 14; Samson’s collection of the honey from the lion is a positive act, and functions here as an underhanded compliment: while Levi may manage to extract goodness from a dangerous situation, he is in peril doing so.

<sup>75</sup> I have translated the last word in this sentence according to the textual variant פִּרְשֵׁת, “you left” as opposed to פִּירְשֵׁת, “you interpreted,” as Dimitrovsky prefers, since it seems to me a more sensible parallel to נִכְנָסֵת; but in either case, the import is that Levi has deviated from the way of the Torah.

<sup>76</sup> MQd 16 / MQd 34, p. 393, ll. 41-47. “דאיהי מוקמה אנפשה” is a rabbinic interpretative principle, e.g. as used in Pesahim 59b.

In addressing Levi directly, Ibn Adret is noticeably mild. He implies that there may be instances where philosophy has something interesting to say about scripture, but nevertheless presses Levi to leave aside his rationalist fascinations and return to teaching traditional subjects. Ibn Adret continues, writing to Levi as though to a peer:

You and I both know that not everybody's intellect is equal; there are those who are weak of intellect and if you instruct them in this knowledge, it will only make the parched thirstier. What will it contribute or add to your life if you take upon yourself responsibility for their souls, since you don't have a way of knowing whether they will live due to this knowledge, or perish and be liable for punishment? Do you not know that such knowledge is dangerous to the Torah, and that the [proverbial] bedcover is too narrow to contain them both?<sup>77</sup>

It is here that Ibn Adret comes closest to defining Levi's transgression as he sees it. Again, this transgression is not primarily derived from what Levi himself believes—Levi is among those gifted with the intelligence to discern the truth within philosophy. However, those who read or hear what Levi teaches may be truly imperiled. It is unclear what exactly Ibn Adret means by invoking the imperilment of the weak-minded, since he defers it to the vague and theological endangerment of the soul. While he may assume that those misguided by philosophy will undermine themselves by behaving improperly, Ibn Adret seems to emphasize the potential for punishment after death. It may be that holding wrongful beliefs without the intellectual capability to resolve them is dangerous in a way that Levi's own improper personal beliefs are not, in Ibn Adret's thinking.

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<sup>77</sup> MQd 16, p. 55 / MQd 34, p. 393, ll. 47-51. The last sentence in this selection is based on Isaiah 28:20, כִּי-קָצַר הַמָּצֵעַ, מִהַשְׁתַּרֵּעַ; וְהַמְסָכָה צָרָה, כְּהִתְכַנֵּס. The midrashic reading of this verse suggests that the latter clause refers to Manasseh bringing an idol into the Temple, as recounted in 2 Chronicles 33:7 (as Rashi notes in contradistinction to his own reading); it seems that the midrashic sense is what Ibn Adret has in mind here, and that he is likening philosophy to idolatry—if only in a literary sense.

Ibn Adret, then, is primarily, though not only, concerned with the spread of ideas, but Levi himself did not realize the reason for Ibn Adret's censure. Upon hearing that Ibn Adret had addressed a letter to him, Levi dispatched an apologia even before receiving it, premised on the fact that he was steeped in the study of Mishnah and Talmud prior to embarking on philosophical studies.<sup>78</sup> However, Ibn Adret was not concerned with Levi's educational background or personal uprightness, but with the ability of those he taught to maintain their own observance of religious precepts. While Levi assumed that Ibn Adret's complaint against him concerned his own qualifications as a teacher and textbook author, Ibn Adret saw the root of the problem in Levi's imprudent exotericism, which made controversial ideas available to those who might become ensnared in the carcass of the lion, never able to extract the honey from the hive within.

"MORE 'GENTILIZED' THAN THE GENTILES"

One problem that did *not* concern Ibn Adret was the possibility of allegoresis leading Jews to Christianity; in fact, he claimed to be more worried by allegoresis' potential to weaken Judaism from within than he was about the competing claims of Christianity, which too made use of allegorical, as well as typological, interpretation in reading the Hebrew Bible. We have already seen that, responding to the contention made by rationalists that logic was a necessary weapon in combating Christian conversionary activity, Ibn Adret insists that rationalism is too insidious a tool

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<sup>78</sup> Neither Levi's apology nor Ibn Adret's original letter to Levi survives, but Ibn Adret's response to Levi's apology is included in *Minḥat Qena'ot* (MQp 16, pp. 54-55 / MQd 34, pp.39-394). The basic premise of Levi's letter is evident from Ibn Adret's response, and is stated by Abba-Mari in the headnote to this response, MQd 16, p. 54 / MQd 34, p. 390, ll. 1-4.

to be used for that purpose.<sup>79</sup> As Ibn Adret presents it, the no-man's-land of Greek philosophy, with its disregard for the authority of scripture, is worse than silence in response to Christian proselytism. Comparing Christian allegoresis to that of Jewish rationalists, Ibn Adret writes:

The decree made by him [Levi] and his supporters is harsher than that of the gentiles: if the gentiles proffer and interpret two or three verses according to their opinion, he and his supporters don't leave a single letter of the Torah alone. Gentiles leave some gleanings of Torah, while he and his ilk libel it completely. Could there be a stranger and foreigner more alien and brutal among all the nations?<sup>80</sup>

Ibn Adret's argument, if disingenuous in its intent to shock, nevertheless counts Levi's alleged total allegorization as worse than Christians' selective typology and allegoresis. He soon extends this sentiment to Muslims as well, writing of Levi: "A man like this cuts down the shoots—shall a person like this enter the home of one of us Jews?"<sup>81</sup> God knows that it's preferable in my view to listen to a gentile (*goy*) or Ishmaelite than to learn from a man like him."<sup>82</sup> He also pledges to Crescas, "Those of us who have been awakened [i.e., to rationalist impropriety] have not yet given up on rescuing [Judaism] from the hands of those who are 'gentilized' (*mitnakrim*) even more than the gentiles (*nokhrim*)!"<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>80</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, p. 381, ll. 92-96. This letter is Ibn Adret's response to Crescas Vidal's report about Levi.

<sup>81</sup> This seems to be a doubly significant reference to ha-Sulami's sheltering of Levi and to the allegorizers' synagogal sermons.

<sup>82</sup> MQp 14, p. 51 / MQd 32, p. 381, ll. 102-104. On the expression "cutting down the shoots," see Chapter 4. This is an instance in which נִי clearly refers to a Christian rather than a non-Jew generically, as it is juxtaposed to ישמעאל, "Muslim."

<sup>83</sup> MQp 14, p. 52 / MQd 32, pp. 383-384, ll. 132-134.

Perhaps this statement was simply a rhetorical flourish, but contained within it is Ibn Adret's anxiety over the failure of the Jewish community to curtail ideational transgression. First, after his biting rhetoric, Ibn Adret explains more soberly why he considers allegoresis a dangerous methodology:

What will such a man do with the commandments of the Torah? Regarding that which the nations denounce, reason implies that the Torah does not mean what it means, for the gentile can [use reason to] interpret as he wishes, for good or ill. Even if wise men have already interpreted it [the Torah], these people will interpret the interpretations, though it is not good to listen to the gentiles who interpret a few of the commandments as parables, or to interpret as per the method of those who abhor justice. The holy people would be doing an injustice by accepting his [Levi's] book.<sup>84</sup>

Here Ibn Adret takes a step back and suggests that the example of the Christians demonstrates that allegorical and other rationalistic interpretation of scripture as a methodology is dangerous because it cuts both ways: it can just as easily lead to Christian readings of scripture as it can those that are consonant with rabbinic tradition. In other words, human reason is morally neutral. In fact, Ibn Adret maintains, even gentiles recognize this danger:

They [the ban opponents] will abandon their [holy] books on account of the books of the Greeks, and the fire will consume their corpses.<sup>85</sup> If, God forbid, there is not one grandchild or great-grandchild left loyal to the Torah who will be zealous and pursue them [the opponents], then it [the Torah] will be annihilated, since these people are transgressors (*kofrim*) according to all religions and their excommunication is carved on the stone tablets of all the nations' books. If this was now made known to the gentiles, they [the opponents] would not be able to escape; gold and silver would not save them from their immorality.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> MQp 14, p. 56 / MQd 32, pp. 382-383, ll. 115-120.

<sup>85</sup> I.e., they will not merit to enter the world-to-come.

<sup>86</sup> MQp 14, p. 56 / MQd 32, p. 383, ll. 120-124.

Here Ibn Adret argues that the adherence to human reason is threatening to all faiths. He claims that non-Jews would not tolerate such ideational transgression in their own society. Ibn Adret would repeat this in his first letter to the Montpellier *qahal* (intended for public circulation): “All the nations (*goyim*) would condemn them [students of philosophy] as transgressors (*koferim*) on grounds of even one of their claims.”<sup>87</sup> It may be that Ibn Adret’s anxiety was due to his concern about Christian involvement in Jewish affairs, as had occurred during the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s.<sup>88</sup>

#### THE TRANSGRESSOR AS EXOTERICIST

What does Levi’s story tell us about ideational transgression in medieval Judaism? It tells us that for traditionalist Jews, such transgression primarily consisted of unlocking the power of morally-neutral human reason through teaching, preaching, or publication. Potentially transgressive beliefs did not inhere in the one who held them, rendering him a transgressor, according to the consensus view. Rather, the rational method by which he arrived at such ideas was problematic, and providing access to it indiscriminately was transgressive. That is why the principal

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<sup>87</sup> MQp 20 / MQd 38, p. 412, l. 55. Some manuscripts (ד, ב) and MQp have “ויענישו אותם על הגוים” rather than “ויענישו אותם כל הגוים ככופרים,” possibly indicating that the line is to be read, “They should be condemned above the heretic gentiles”; Ms. ג has “ויענישו אותם על הגוים ככופרים,” “They should be condemned as heretics more so than gentiles.”

<sup>88</sup> Certainly he could not have been untouched by knowledge of very real Christian machinations against heresy, including heresy within the ranks of Christianity, which rent Occitania in the 1220s and prompted the institution of a papal inquisition. Nor could he have forgotten the increasing charge against Jews of anti-Christian blasphemy, invoked by the mendicant movement and in popular anti-Jewish libels throughout the thirteenth century. But see Jacob b. Makhir’s lack of concern over Christian involvement, and his praise for Christians’ assimilation of Greek knowledge into their educational curriculum in his letter, MQp 39, p. 85 / MQd 58, p. 510, ll. 54-60.

tactic used by ban proponents to combat ideational transgression was a ban against its study by young people. Levi's situation also reveals that accusations of ideational transgression were not imposed lightly. As maligned as he was, Levi was defended by prominent members of the community and deferred to even by Ibn Adret. Even at their most serious, the allegations did not imperil Levi's life. The eventual bans—toothless, it would turn out—addressed philosophical study generally, never confronting Levi's teaching directly. The potential for ideational transgression may have been powerful enough a force to drag a Barcelona authority into the affairs of Occitania, but it was not sufficiently dangerous to warrant a blanket ban on philosophy nor to punish Levi, or anyone else, on an individual level. Even the finger pointed at Levi was incidental, the result of Crescas Vidal's misunderstanding of his brother's more general inquiry about philosophical activity in Perpignan. There were, in the end, no heresies or heretics in medieval Jewish Occitania—only seductive ideas and reckless teachers.

## CONCLUSION

Are there ideas that a Jew is not permitted to think, ideas which, if believed true, inherently contradict the truths of the Torah? Abba-Mari was probably not asking himself this question when, frustrated, he sat down to write to Ibn Adret about the young people in Montpellier who were enthralled with Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Even though we possess this first letter, it is difficult to tell precisely what he was thinking, since he uses the florid and indirect writing style of the educated aristocracy of his day, of which he was very much a member. Despite the outsize emotions displayed in his words, Abba-Mari does not paint a picture of a world turned upside down by the rampant belief of unpermitted ideas and the attendant refusal of the masses to adhere to Jewish law and a Jewish way of life. He has choice words for the imbecility of particular notions, without ever describing them as impermissible in the sense of antinomian. Abba-Mari is convinced that keeping young, susceptible minds away from incorrect ideas would preserve the rightful order of his society, while permitting more mature minds to access all that is interesting, valid, and

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<sup>1</sup> Or, at any rate, what he and they considered to be the work of Aristotle, but which was in fact a medieval hybrid of Plato, Neoplatonists, Aristotle, and various Greek and Islamic commentators passed down via multiple translations as well as encyclopedic summaries and, especially in the case of early fourteenth-century Occitan Jews, the Tibbonide translations of the works of Moses b. Maimon (Rambam, Maimonides, c. 1140-1210), who integrated Aristotelianism into a Jewish framework. On Maimonides' Aristotle, see Daniel H. Frank, "Maimonides and Medieval Aristotelianism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by *idem.* and Oliver Leaman, 135-156 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Thomas F. Glick, "Maimonides and the Spanish Aristotelian School," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, edited by Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000). On medieval Aristotelianism generally, see, *inter alia*, F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*. New York: New York University Press, 1968); Fernand van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism*, 2nd ed., translated by Leonard Johnston (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1970); and F. W. Zimmerman, "The Origins of the So-Called *Theology of Aristotle*," in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts*, edited by Jill Kraye, W. F. Ryan and C. B. Schmitt, 110-240 (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1986).



valuable in non-Jewish rational philosophy. He thus takes for granted the truth and untruth of particular ideas, considering untruths to be impossible to believe and their adoption a matter of ignorance alone. Could it be that he could not conceive of an impermissible idea?

Such an idea is usually referred to in the secondary literature on various medieval cultures, as discussed in chapter four, as “heretical”; adhering to it, “heresy.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it has often been proposed that Abba-Mari and his soon-to-be cadre of supporters were concerned about heresy, and that the controversy he started is primarily about identifying and preventing heresy in Judaism. What this term means in a Jewish context, as we have seen, is unclear.<sup>3</sup> Heresy is, of course, a word of Greek origin and a concept drawn from the study of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> By analogy, applying this

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<sup>2</sup> Within Jewish studies, see for example, Joseph Davis, “Drawing the Line: Views of Jewish Heresy and Belief among Medieval and Early Modern Ashkenazic Jews,” in *Rabbinic Culture and its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, edited by Matt Goldish and Daniel Frank, 161–194 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008); or Menachem Kellner, “Heresy and the Nature of Faith in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1987): 299–318; and note the official translation of the title of Isaiah Tishby’s *מסות ומחקרים בספרות הקבלה והשבתאות* as *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* (Ramat Gan, 1964; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> “Heresy” is a problematic term, since it possesses technical, cultural-historical, and popular dimensions that are often at odds with one another. As a translation of Hebrew terms such as *minut* or *kefirah*, “heresy” is often misleading, suggesting a parallel to Christian theological heresy, which does not have an analogue in contemporaneous European Jewry (and is in any case hardly representative of medieval Christian heresy, which could be sectarian and anticlerical as well as dogmatic). Elisheva Carlebach makes this observation also in *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 15, as does Jacques Berlinerblau in “Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa,” *History of Religions* 40, no. 4 (2001): 328.

<sup>4</sup> An overview of the complex subject of Christian heresy can be found in Edward Peters, *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe: Documents in Translation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); G. R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003); Andrew Roach, *The Devil's World: Heresy and Society, 1100–1300* (London: Longman, 2005); and G. Verbeke, “Philosophy and Heresy: Some Conflicts Between Reason and Faith,” in *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages (11th–13th Centuries)*, edited by W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (Louvain, 1976). The distinction between premodern heresy and modern unbelief existed, in its own variety, in Christian culture as well: see V. A. Demant,

understanding of heresy to medieval Judaism implies that there was a requirement of belief incumbent upon all Jews which, if transgressed, altered one's status as a Jew. What this would look like is murky: what doctrines are required, then? How is failure to assent to them ascertained—is it a private matter between an individual and God, or a public matter to be adjudicated in the *beit din*? And if it should be possible to adjudicate, what would be the result of such a denial of creed—the theoretical denial of a place in the world-to-come, or the pragmatic reversal of Jewish status, rendering one ineligible for such things as marriage or burial in a Jewish cemetery?<sup>5</sup>

In fact, in the whole of *Minḥat Qena'ot* not one of these questions is addressed. What, then, *were* ban proponents so concerned about? The fears that motivated Abba-Mari and his supporters to seek a controversial ban on the underage study of non-Jewish philosophy remained largely inchoate throughout the controversy. He, Ibn Adret, and the other ban proponents produced many folios of writing on the dangers of philosophy to susceptible minds, writing that in many places sharply critical, harshly personal, even vitriolic—without ever stating what it was that they feared philosophy would concretely cause to come about in their communities. It is perhaps

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“Ancient Heresy and Modern Unbelief,” *The Journal of Religion* 27, no. 2 (1947): 79-90. See also John Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish and Early Christian Patterns* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Menachem Kellner has argued, “Two very different conceptions of the nature of heresy and the question of who is a heretic are to be found in medieval Jewish texts. I wish to suggest here that these different conceptions reflect (not surprisingly) different answers to the question ‘Who is a Jew?’, and that these different answers reflect in turn different conceptions of the nature of religious faith. In other words, the controversy over the nature of heresy was a dispute not over what Jews were expected to believe (the content of faith) so much as over what it means to say that a person is a believer (the nature of faith). We may say that the question is less one of theology than of epistemology” (“Heresy and the Nature of Faith in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 [1987]: 299). However, even epistemological status was not in question in the 1304-1306 controversy. Nowhere is the Jewishness of an individual threatened.

characteristically medieval that the heart of the matter remains tactfully restrained from expression by codes of communication and the learned, belletristic style required of educated men.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that something specific and significant worried the ban proponents, something which they never fully articulated but which was the ultimate force driving their legislative efforts. The world revealed in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, seemingly familiar by virtue of the relatively lavish scholarly attention granted to the controversy, emerges as a nuanced, ambiguous communal debate punctuated by genuine emotion—fear, pride, excitement, revulsion—and marked, always, by its very real application to Jewish life.

On the one hand, it is clear that proponents of the ban conceive of the danger of rational philosophy to their worldview, and the functioning of their communities that relies upon this worldview. This is what Marina Rustow means when she criticizes, in her recent work on heresy in the Islamic Mediterranean, the “widespread misconception that Judaism is a religion of praxis rather than belief, in which adhering to behavioral precepts, rather than particular doctrines, renders one a member in good standing.”<sup>6</sup> There cannot be praxis in the absence of a conceptual

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<sup>6</sup> Marina Rustow, “Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Case Studies of Jewish Heresy,” *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 35. Rustow points out that rabbinic disinterest in theology has led to a commonplace tendency to view medieval Judaism as requiring orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy—seeing it through an Enlightenment lens, as it were. She examines three cases to illustrate this point: the first dating to the eleventh-century Jerusalem, the second to fifteenth-century Cairo, and the third to eighteenth-century Amsterdam. It should be noted, however, that classing ideas of the heretical from the early modern with those of the medieval period requires qualification. This is especially true in the case of Sabbatean antinomian heresy, which was charged with both heterodoxy and heteropraxy, including deification of the messiah and multiplication of the essences of the Godhead, charges which played no role in the Maimonidean controversies. Matt Goldish makes this point in “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in the 1689 London Sermons of Ḥakham Solomon Ailion,” in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Howard Kreisel and Chanita Goodblatt, 139–165 (Be’er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 142. On orthopraxy in Moses Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* and its influence on Wissenschaft, see Elizabeth Weber, “Fending Off Idolatry: Ceremonial Law in Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*,”

framework, and while this framework need not be systematic, as in formal theology, there are certain beliefs required in order to ask, say, the question with which the Talmud famously opens, and to heed the answers to it: from what time is it permissible to recite the morning *Shema*? Mark Shapiro has suggested that while Judaism lacks a consensus on “salvific dogmas,”—“dogmas the belief in which guarantees one a place in heaven”—there is unanimous understanding among “all medieval authorities, as well as the talmudic rabbis, [that] there were certain dogmas which Jews were obligated to believe in, simply because the religion is unintelligible without them.”<sup>7</sup> This, perhaps, is closer to what ban proponents were attempting to protect: those ideas that threatened to make the theory of halakhah unintelligible.

In a post-Maimonidean world, ban proponents did not eschew “external” modes of thinking and writing altogether; their objection was subtler, subliminal even, apologetic as often as it was insistent. It is as if they detected the whiff of potential transgression in what they perceived to be an overeager response to rationalism, of the sort expressed in Joseph Ibn Kaspi’s *Yoreh De’ah*: “Does not the discernment or teaching of the Creator’s existence or His perfect unity equal in importance that of [the rule concerning] a small milk spoon?”<sup>8</sup> Ibn Adret would come perhaps the closest of any ban proponent to defining that which troubled them:

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*Modern Language Notes* 122, no. 3 (2007): 522-543; Edward Breuer, “Rabbinic Law and Spirituality in Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 86, no. 3 (1996): 299-321; Jeffrey C. Blutinger, “‘So-called Orthodoxy’: The History of an Unwanted Label,” *Modern Judaism* 27, no. 3 (2007): 310-328.

<sup>7</sup> Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Oxford and Portland, Ore.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Usually referred to as Ibn Kaspi’s “Ethical Will,” the premodern title of the work was, according to Ibn Kaspi’s text, *יורה דעה*, although it was also called *ספר מוסר*; it was edited by Israel Abrahams from two manuscripts and published along with an English translation in *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia:

Please tell me whether the newly-born child who, like an untamed calf, has not been educated, if he should be taught what nature decrees, and if he [then] be taught what our Torah decrees—would the youth believe that the world was created out of a complete void? Wouldn't he establish in his heart [i.e., mind] the simple before the substantive?<sup>9</sup> And after he hears that that which is incapable of existence (*nimna*<sup>9</sup>) has an existing essence (*teva*<sup>9</sup> *qayyam*), the possibility of miracles (*mofetim*) which nature disallows will enter his heart, and he will return to being a denier (*kofer*) of the world's createdness (*ḥiddush ha-ʿolam*), and will revert with regard to miracles... For the youths will say, 'What is it that these miserable Jews are doing, placing fringes on their edges, *mezuzot* upon the openings of their gates, and on their heads, *tefillin*? I have already learned and have been taught about the creation of miracles to which all of these things are irrelevant, and have no place in rationalism (*sikhliyyut*)'... For this reason we have said, and on this matter we have asked, that young men be given a measure of time until they have filled their bellies with the religion (*dat*) of the Jews, and after they establish a foundation in their Torah, they may take content from all other forms of knowledge and discard the rinds, for their hands will be strengthened with the religion which their forefathers received.<sup>10</sup>

This is a rare moment in *Minḥat Qena'ot*, one in which a ban proponent explicitly connects specific philosophical ideas with the questioning of *mizvot*—always *ḥuqqim*, the category of *mizvot* classified in the rabbinic period as *a priori* irrational. Even here, Ibn Adret is circumspect about the dangers of such reasoning, leaving it to the reader to imagine the end result of questioning *ḥuqqim*: presumably, the abandonment of such ancient and daily rituals as the wearing of *tefillin*. Can the wholesale abandonment of Jewish observance be far behind? Will a person who considers *tefillin* a pointless exercise refrain from eating *ḥamez* during Passover? Will he accept the authority of a rabbinic court in a matter of marriage or a property dispute? What would be the fate of such a

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Jewish Publication Society, 1926; reprint, Jewish Publication Society, 1976 [one-volume facsimile]): 127-161. This passage occurs on p. 152: "ולמה לא ישוה פסק או הוראה ממציאות הבורא או אחדותו הגדולה ככך חולבת הקטנה?"

<sup>9</sup> "קל וחומר, a *fortiori*. Ibn Adret's wordplay unpacks the phrase into its constituent parts, rendering something like "the simple (קל) before the substantive (חומר)." This is also Dimitrovsky's understanding: see his note to l. 62, MQd 61, pp. 541-542.

<sup>10</sup> MQp 42, p. 94 / MQd 61, ll. 59-72, pp. 541-542.

person in a society in which assimilation was inconceivable—conversion? It is impossible to know whether these were the ultimate worries of the ban proponents, since they are never stated, by Ibn Adret, Abba-Mari, or anyone else. But the depth of their anxiety is clear, moving ban proponents to attempt to legislate access to philosophical writing even at the risk of dividing communities and transgressing jurisdictional boundaries, both matter of great concern to proponents and risks they did not take lightly.

In the particular unfolding of the 1304-1306 controversy, the regulation of belief itself remains outside the legislative interest of the party working towards the ban of excommunication, their legislative interests instead concentrating on restricting access to those texts containing ideas rife with potential to inspire transgression. This was a curricular solution: a ban on the study of philosophy similar to the ancient one restricting the study of mysticism to mature students. (In fact, the proposed ban was less restrictive, permitting study at the age of twenty-five rather than forty.) Despite the Maimonideanism that suffused their intellectual world, ban proponents were loathe to define, in halakhic terms, the point at which holding a particular idea became unacceptable. Instead of legislating ideation, proponents of a halakhic solution to the rationalist threat suggested legislating access to philosophical materials. In so doing, they were following earlier, traditional models of limiting study of sensitive material, taking the example of mysticism, which from its inception in the talmudic period had been restricted to those over the age of forty, as well as using the traditional tool of the *herem* (ban of excommunication) to censure those who would subvert the interdiction, whether by engaging in underage study or instructing those who had not attained the appropriate age. Their approach was a stop-gap measure with precedent in

rabbinic restriction on the study of legitimate, though potentially misused, interpretations of Jewish texts, and one that utilized the acceptable tool of excommunication. It was thus conventional and uninventive, likely in attempt to mollify critics.

The attempt was unsuccessful; opponents of the ban strenuously defended the permissibility, utility, and traditionalism, within an Occitan context, of the study of those texts that proponents deemed problematic, rejecting the claim that ideational transgression was direly potential within rationalist philosophy. However, they too utilized conventional means of legislation—a counter-excommunication—without innovating legislatively the permissibility of or access to the texts under proposed ban. Ideational transgression was the unnamed specter of the controversy, woefully invoked and insistently defended, but undefined and unlegislated; the significance of a theory of halakhah was alluded to but never developed. Yes, there were impermissible ideas, if only insofar as they lead one to actively violate halakhah; but their role in altering one's status, one's self-definition, was apparently of little interest to ban proponents. The controversy revolves instead around cultural control of external knowledge, with the degree of control proposed being somewhat meager even in the case of ban proponents. The direness of Abba-Mari's appeal, Ibn Adret's quick and earnest involvement, and the opposition can only point to the greater significance of the problem of ideational transgression sensed by Occitan and Iberian Jews at the turn of the fourteenth century—a sense that would prove prescient.

The fourteenth-century controversy was effectively the last in a series of outbreaks of intense intercommunal discussions surrounding the integration of a new, Aristotelian wave of

Greco-Islamic rationalist philosophy with Jewish thought, specifically with Jewish legal reasoning.<sup>11</sup> The 1304-1306 conflict over rationalism was not only an intellectual disagreement about differing ideals, but an ongoing struggle to direct the social realities of Jewish practice through the acceptance or rejection of the authority of reason. This “last” Maimonidean controversy in particular provides a unique opportunity to assess the relationship of individual, intellectual work to social aspects of medieval Jewish communities. What emerges is that even the most rarified of intellectual works in a host of genres—treatises, commentaries, epistles, and more—were not divorced from the real lives and actions of individual members of the communities of Montpellier, Perpignan, Barcelona, and numerous others across Occitania and Iberia. Though limited to a small sector of the population that was educated, literate, and usually wealthy, it was these aristocrats who formed the leadership of the community and whose actions were of particular importance to its direction. Thus the sons of the Perpignan élite who sought out Levi b. Abraham’s instruction, and those further afield for whom he composed his encyclopedias, were in real ways potential adopters of the rationalist approach to scripture—and thus to halakhah—that Levi proposed.

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<sup>11</sup> It would be inaccurate to imply that the early fourteenth-century Maimonidean controversy was the last time premodern Judaism would confront the problem of rational thought and its appropriate role in religious life. On the contrary, this problem would stubbornly resurface, most notably at Prague in the sixteenth century, on which see Jacob Elbaum, *פתיחות והסתגרות: היצירה הרוחנית-ספרותית בפולין ובארצות* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), Isadore Twersky, “Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman, 431-457 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), and Joseph M. Davis, “R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Joseph b. Isaac ha-Levi, and Rationalism in Ashkenazic Jewish Culture, 1550-1650,” Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1990), among others. However, the event instigated by Abba-Mari would be the last time that the discussion about rationalism and “external” knowledge would take the form of a highly deliberate, inter-communal exchange of letters, as it did during the lifetime of the Maimonides, again in the 1230s, once more in the 1280s-1290s, and, finally, at the turn of the fourteenth century.



Scattered by the expulsions of the fourteenth century, these enthralled young men would in fact continue and reshape the Occitan tradition, producing philosophical treatises, translations, and exegesis which took Maimonideanism to new heights. Among the most erudite, daring, and significant of them was Gersonides, whose massive *magnus opus* *Milḥamot 'Adonai* argued, among other things, that God has no knowledge of particulars. Gersonides lived and worked in Orange, then governed by the papacy, which welcomed the settlement of Jews. His stand-alone treatise also typified the new turn to philosophical forms among late Occitan thinkers, who preferred the treatise to the encyclopedia or verse commentary. (Gersonides also produced a Torah commentary that is often described as “radical” in the secondary literature, but in addition to its line-by-line comments, which are notably less dense than those of the previous centuries, he prefaces each section with an essay.) This move neutralized somewhat the threat of mixing rationalism with revelation, as it more effectively separated speculation from halakhah. It also resulted in a rich and productive philosophical movement which many Occitans and their descendents would take with them into Italy, where they migrated from the Comtat Venaissin. Thus the late phase of Occitan Jewry was ushered in by the 1304-1306 controversy, rather than terminated by the controversy. The cultural history of Occitan Jewry requires reconfiguration, with Abba-Mari’s consternation as its third act.

The unarticulated anxiety of the ban proponents was to prove prescient. Paradoxically, Jewish philosophy of the systematic variety, crystallized under the influence of Islamic appreciation of Greek rationalism and developed in parallel with its rediscovery in the Latin West, was to reach an apex of productivity and creativity among the scattered Occitans of post-expulsion France, only

to decline in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While Jewish rationalism was to continue, and even flourish, into modernity in distinct pockets of time and place, its significance as a means of reinterpreting tradition within Jewish societies gave way to other hermeneutics, principally new methods of Talmud study and significant development of Qabbalah. In spite of the waning power of rationalist philosophy, however, as the later Middle Ages gave way to early modernity, the concerns of fourteenth-century ban proponents were to be borne out. Ideas, it turned out, were demonstrably dangerous, be they philosophical, scientific, or mystical. Ideation could, in concert with other forces, of course, lead to conversion to Christianity (one thinks of Solomon ha-Levi of Burgos, baptized Pablo de Santa Maria el Burguense, c. 1350–1435), to rejection of halakhic norms (under the influence of the messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi, 1626–1676), to denial of the divine origins of the Torah (prototypically, Barukh de Spinoza, 1632–1677). As Judaism was, however imperfectly, separated from citizenship in the emancipation movements of Western Europe, the power of ideas to effect transgressive actions could be actualized far more readily. Moreover, the theoretical edifice supporting rabbinic authority and its supremacy within the *qahal* was no longer needed, meaning that behavior was no longer communally regulated. This is why the Maimonidean controversies are still with us today, if much transmuted and bearing little semblance to their meaning or form in their original context: as beliefs were privatized, so too were the consequences of upholding them, freeing the acts potential within them for the doing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–31.

APPENDIX 1 | NUMBERING OF *MINḤAT QENA'OT* LETTERS WITH EQUIVALENCE TABLES

Equivalence Table for the Letters included in Select Editions of *Minḥat Qena'ot*

Pressburg Edition (MQp)	Dimitrovsky Edition (MQd)	Comments
Introduction	Introduction	
Ch. 1	1	
Ch. 2	2	
Ch. 3	3	
Ch. 4	4	
Ch. 5	5	
Ch. 6	6	
Ch. 7	7	
Ch. 8	8	
Ch. 9	9	
Ch. 10	10	
Ch. 11	11	
Ch. 12	12	
Ch. 13	13	
Ch. 14	14	
Ch. 15	15	
Ch. 16	16	
Ch. 17	17	
Ch. 18	18	
[Letter] 1	19	The “letters” section is indicated in MQp, in contradistinction to the intro. “chapters.”
2	20	
3	21	
4	22	
5	23	
6	24	

7	25	
8	26	
9	27	
10	28	
11	29	
12	30	
13	31	
14	32	
15	33	
16	34	
17	35	
18	36	
19	37	
20	38	
21	39	
22	40	
23	41/42	MQd breaks headnote & letter into separate chapters.
24	43	
25	44	
26	45	
27	46	
28	47	
29	48	
30	49	
31	50	
32	51	
33	52.1, 2, 3	Section includes three full texts of letters, which I have indicated with the decimals.
34	53	
35	54	
36	55	
37	56	
38	57	
39	58	
40	59	
41	60	
42	61	
43	62	
44	63	
45	64	
46	65	

47	66	
48	67	
49	68	
50	69	
51	70	
52	71	
53	72	
54	73	
55	74	
56	75	
57	76	
58	77	This is the letter into which <i>Sefer ha-Yare'ah</i> is “embedded.”
<i>Sefer ha-Yare'ah</i> Introduction	<i>Sefer ha-Yare'ah</i> Introduction	
Ch. 1	Ch. 1	
Ch. 2	Ch. 2	
Ch. 3	Ch. 3	
Ch. 4	Ch. 4	
Ch. 5	Ch. 5	
Ch. 6	Ch. 6	
Ch. 7	Ch. 7	
Ch. 8	Ch. 8	
Ch. 9	Ch. 9	
Ch. 10	Ch. 10	
Ch. 11	Ch. 11	
Ch. 12	Ch. 12	
Ch. 13	Ch. 13	
Ch. 14	Ch. 14	
Ch. 15	Ch. 15	
59	78	
60	79	
61	80	
62	81	
63	82	
64	83	
65	84	
66	85	
67	86	
68	87	
69	88	

70	89	
71	90	
72	91	
73	92	
74	93	
75	94	
76	95	
77	96	
78	97	
79	98	
Ps-80	99	Marked “pseudo” since this letter is accounted for but excluded in the numbering scheme of MQp.
Ps-81	100	As above.
81(a)	101	In MQp, this and the following section are both labeled 81; indicated here by 81(a) and 81(b).
81(b)	102	As above.
82	103	
83	104	
84	105	
85	106	
86	107	
87	108	
89(a)	109	There is no letter 88 in MQp; instead, the next two sections are both numbered 89.
89(b)-90	110	MQd ch. 110 includes the 2 <sup>nd</sup> section numbered 89 in MQp (see above) and the section numbered 90 in MQp.
91	111	
92	112	
93	113	
94	114	
95	115	
96	116	
97	117	
98	118	
99	119	
100	120(a)	Includes responsa from the Rashba & Rosh, printed as separate chs. in MQd.
101	120(b)	As above.

Equivalence Table for the Additional Letters included in Some Editions of *Minḥat Qena'ot*

Pressburg Ed. (MQp)	Dimitrovsky Ed. (MQd)	Mekhon Even Yisrael Ed. (MQey)	Israelitische Letterbode 4 & 5	Other Printed Sources	Manuscript Sources	Comments
	*121	*102	*121			Contemporary
		*103	*122			1210s
		*104	*123			1210s
		*105	*124			1210s
		*106	*125			1210s
		*107	*126			Form letter
	*122	*108	*127			Contemporary
	*123	*109	*128			Contemporary
	*124	*110	*129			Contemporary
	*125	*111	*130			Contemporary
	*126	*114 (note order)				Eulogy: Rashba
	*127	*112	*131			Eulogy: ha- Meiri +1
Ps-*102		*113	*132	Iggerot Qena'ot 23a- 24b		Petit bans (1290s)
		Ps-*115				Contemporary
		Ps-*116				Contemporary
		Ps-*117		Rashba, Responsa Vol. 1, no. 418; M. Stern in Kokhevei Yizḥaq		Ha-Penini, כתב ההתנצלות
		Ps-*118		J. Perles, R. Salomo; Dimitrovsky, vol. 1 res. 36; B. Naor (2008)	Breslau Ms. 59 (=Ms. Saraval 26); Ms. Mich. 509; Athens Jewish Museum Ms. 79.199; JNUL Ms. Heb. 8°0773	מאמר ישמעאל (attrib. Rashba)
		Ps-*119		Rashba, Responsa Vol. 4; J. Perles, R.	Breslau Ms. 59 (=Ms. Saraval 26); Ms. Mich.	Rashba, Anti- Christian

				Salomo	509	polemic
		Ps-*120		D. Kaufmann, in Zunz Jubelschrift	Bodleian Ms. Pococke 280	Simon b. Joseph, חושן המשפט
				D. Kaufmann, in REJ 29	Bodleian Ms. Pococke 280	Simon b. Joseph, letter to the Rashba
				D. Kaufmann, in REJ 29	Bodleian Ms. Pococke 280	Simon b. Joseph, letter on the 1306 expulsion
					Vatican Ms. Ebr. 256	Abba-Mari, letter to the Rashba
				Rosh, Responsa, no. 24		Abba-Mari, letter
				Rashba, Responsa, Vol. 1: nos. 167, 413, 424-428, 825		Abba-Mari, letter



## APPENDIX 2 | LETTERS WITH SIGNATORIES

Parentheses indicate an element of the name that is omitted in some manuscripts, or alternate (usually vernacular) names. The patronymic particle b. encompasses *ben*, *bar*, and **ibn** where it is used as a true patronymic and not part of a surname. Honorifics appear in the form most common in the sources, with the exception of those (ל"י, יצ"י, and so on) that occur in multiple variations among mss.

### Letter 20 [38] – from Barcelona

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1) Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Adret          | 10) Solomon b. Moses (Falqoni)       |
| 2) Isaac b. Joseph (b. Ishai)            | 11) Shealtiel b. Samuel b. Shealtiel |
| 3) Jacob b. Ḥasdai                       | 12) Abraham b. Reuben                |
| 4) Zerahiah b. Sheshet (Ḥen)             | 13) Samuel b. Joseph                 |
| 5) Isaac b. Todros                       | 14) Shealtiel b. Isaac b. Moses      |
| 6) Jacob b. Shealtiel                    | 15) Isaac b. Moses b. Shealtiel      |
| 7) Makhir b. Sheshet (Ḥen)               | 16) Meshullam b. Isaac (Ḥani)        |
| 8) Makhir b. Abba-Mari                   | 17) Isaac b. Samuel                  |
| 9) Isaac b. Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Adret |                                      |

In MQp, there are 15 signatures (Makhir b. Abba-Mari and Shealtiel b. Isaac b. Moses are missing) and the names appear in a different order.

### Letter 23 [41/42] – from the Montpellier traditionalists

- |                                  |                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Isaac b. Avigdor              | 14) Simon b. Joseph Lunel          |
| 2) Solomon b. Asher              | 15) Isaac b. Moses b. Judah        |
| 3) Jacob b. Simon                | 16) Moses b. Abraham               |
| 4) Mordecai b. Jacob Avignon     | 17) Solomon b. Jacob               |
| 5) Solomon b. Judah Lunel        | 18) Solomon b. Moses (רש"י תמך)    |
| 6) Isaac b. Judah de Lattes Leon | 19) Gershom b. David               |
| 7) Meshullam b. Abba-Mari        | 20) Judah b. Joshua                |
| 8) Ḥalafta b. Abba-Mari          | 21) Joshua b. Reuben               |
| 9) Solomon b. Neḥemiah Avignon   | 22) Saul ha-Kohen b. Saul ha-Kohen |
| 10) Saul b. Solomon              | 23) Jacob b. Joshua                |
| 11) Judah b. Moses b. Isaac      | 24) Yequiel b. Meshullam           |
| 12) Ḥalafta b. Abraham Avignon   | 25) Abba-Mari b. Moses b. Joseph   |
| 13) Samuel b. Abraham Avignon    |                                    |

In MQp, there are 26 signatures, but they are not identical to the MQd list with one additional name. Aside from appearing in a different order, five men from the MQd list are missing: Isaac b. Judah de Lattes Leon, Meshullam b. Abba-Mari, Isaac b. Moses b. Judah, Joshua b. Reuben, and Jacob b. Joshua. In their place, six are added: **Simon b. Joseph** (who appears along with Simon b. Joseph Lunel, on the line following, so this is not the same man), **Samuel b. Abba-Mari** (perhaps a scribal error for Meshullam b. Abba-Mari, or vice versa), **Meshullam b. Meir** [Zvi], and three men with names partly or entirely in the vernacular: **Don Dublosel**, **Don Rosh ha-Ramsi**, and **Saul de Melab**.

### Letter 47 [66] – from Argentièrre in support of the traditionalists

- |                           |                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1) Aaron b. Perez Avignon | 2) Meshullam b. Shealtiel Avignon |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 3) Ḥalafta b. Joseph Lunel                     | 7) Aaron b. Shelemiah Lunel                            |
| 4) Meshullam b. Jacob Lunel                    | 8) Mordecai (ha-)Kohen b. Solomon ha-Kohen (דברנידברט) |
| 5) Nathan b. Abraham                           |  |
| 6) Nathan (ha-Kohen) b. David (ha-)Kohen Lunel |  |

In MQp, the names are nearly identical but appear in a slightly different order. Variations are noted in parentheses as above.

**Letter 54 [73] – from Lunel in support of the traditionalists**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Meir b. Eliezer b. Joseph              | 6) Meshullam (Ibn) David (Ibn) Avigdor  |
| 2) Moses b. Eliezer b. Joseph             | 7) Ḥalafta ha-Kohen b. Solomon ha-Kohen |
| 3) Meshullam ha-Kohen b. Asher (ha-Kohen) | 8) Jacob b. (כבוד ר') David             |
| 4) Samuel ha-Kohen b. Moses (ha-Kohen)    | 9) Isaac b. Moses                       |
| 5) Qalonymus b. Judah                     | 10) Meir b. Isaiah                      |

In MQp, the names are nearly identical but appear in a slightly different order.

**Letter 78 [97] – from the Montpellier traditionalist faction to Barcelona**

- 1) Shelemiah b. Judah Lunel
- 2) Abba-Mari (b. Moses) b. Joseph
- 3) Eliezer b. Ḥayyim (b. Moses)
- 4) Joseph b. Simon Lunel
- 5) Solomon b. Abraham (Ibn Adret)
- 6) Solomon b. Neḥemiah

In MQp, all names are the same (with variations noted) except for Joseph b. Simon Lunel, who is noted as **Simon b. Joseph Lunel**.

**Letter Ps-80 [99] – from Barcelona to Montpellier – This letter is noted in MQp, but not included there.**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1) Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret         | 16) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi      |
| 2) Isaac b. Joseph b. Ishai            | 17) Isaac b. Samuel                      |
| 3) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen                | 18) Reuben b. Barzillai b. Shealtiel     |
| 4) Jacob b. Ḥasdai                     | 19) Shealtiel b. Samuel b. Shealtiel     |
| 5) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi      | 20) Judah ha-Levi b. Abraham             |
| 6) Jacob b. Shealtiel                  | 21) Joseph b. Benveniste                 |
| 7) Ezra b. Sheshet                     | 22) Makhir b. Sheshet Ḥen                |
| 8) Sheshet b. Shealtiel                | 23) Sheshet b. Reuben                    |
| 9) Shealtiel b. Isaac b. Moses Ḥen     | 24) Judah ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai ha-Levi      |
| 10) Joshua b. Zerahiah b. Shealtiel    | 25) Isaac b. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret |
| 11) Samuel b. Joseph                   | 26) Abraham b. Samuel b. Judah           |
| 12) Abba-Mari b. Isaac b. Meshullam    | 27) Isaac b. Solomon b. Menaḥem          |
| 13) Makhir b. Sheshet b. Moses ha-Levi | 28) Abba-Mari b. Ḥanokh ha-Kohen         |
| 14) Isaac b. Todros                    | 29) Abraham b. Reuben                    |
| 15) Zerahiah b. Sheshet Ḥen            | 30) Abun b. Abraham                      |

- 31) Solomon b. Judah
- 32) Meshullam b. Isaac b. Meshullam b. Benveniste
- 33) Abraham b. Nathan
- 34) Judah b. Isaiah

- 35) Meshullam b. Samuel ha-Kohen Ibn Ardur
- 36) Isaac b. Samuel b. Judah b. Samuel Qaf
- 37) Abraham b. Isaac
- 38) Uziel b. Solomon

**Letter 81(a) [100] – from Barcelona to Montpellier**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham (Ibn) Adret\*
- 2) Isaac b. Joseph b. (Ibn) Ishai\*
- 3) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi
- 4) Shealtiel b. Solomon
- 5) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen\*
- 6) Jacob b. Ḥasdai\*
- 7) Zerahiah b. Sheshet Ḥen
- 8) Abraham b. Reuben
- 9) Joshua b. Zerahiah b. Shealtiel
- 10) Isaac b. Meshullam
- 11) Makhir b. Sheshet Ḥen
- 12) Judah ha-Levi b. Abraham
- 13) Abraham b. Samuel b. Judah Qaf
- 14) Isaac b. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 15) Makhir ha-Levi b. Sheshet ha-Levi
- 16) Shealtiel b. Isaac b. Moses Ḥen
- 17) Isaac b. Solomon b. Menaḥem
- 18) Meshullam b. Isaac (b. Meshullam)\*
- 19) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi
- 20) Abun b. Abraham

- 21) Judah (ha-Levi) b. Ḥasdai (ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai)\*
- 22) Sheshet b. Shealtiel b. Isaac
- 23) Sheshet b. Reuben
- 24) Jacob b. Shealtiel
- 25) Ezra b. Sheshet
- 26) Joseph b. Benveniste
- 27) Isaac b. Samuel b. Judah Qaf
- 28) Reuben b. Barzillai (b. Shealtiel)\*
- 29) Meshullam b. Samuel ha-Kohen b. Ardur
- 30) Abba-Mari b. Isaac b. Meshullam
- 31) Solomon b. Judah\*
- 32) Abba-Mari b. Ḥanokh
- 33) Judah b. Yeshua\*
- 34) Abraham b. Nathan
- 35) Isaac b. Judah b. Samuel Qaf
- 36) David b. Menaḥem
- 37) Abraham b. Isaac Qaf
- 38) Uziel b. Solomon

In MQp, eight names appear in common, to which Shealtiel b. Samuel is added. (A Shealtiel b. Samuel b. Shealtiel appears in five places in MQd, including the following letter.) Their precise order and form are:

**Alternate list A (from MQp)**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Adret
- 2) Isaac b. Joseph Ibn Ishai
- 3) Jacob b. Ḥasdai
- 4) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen
- 5) Moses Levi b. Isaac
- 6) Shealtiel b. Samuel

- 7) Judah Levi b. Ḥasdai
- 8) Reuben b. Barzillai
- 9) Meshullam b. Isaac
- 10) Sheshet b. Reuben
- 11) Judah b. Yeshua
- 12) Solomon b. Judah

**Letter 82 [101] – from Barcelona to Montpellier**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 2) Isaac b. Joseph b. Ishai
- 3) Jacob b. Ḥasdai
- 4) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen
- 5) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi

- 6) Shealtiel b. Samuel b. Shealtiel
- 7) Jacob b. Shealtiel
- 8) Abraham b. Reuben
- 9) Abba-Mari b. Isaac b. Meshullam
- 10) Samuel b. Joseph

- 11) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi
- 12) Isaac b. Ḥasdai
- 13) Sheshet b. Shealtiel b. Isaac
- 14) Abraham b. Samuel b. Judah Qaf
- 15) Abba-Mari b. Makhir
- 16) Makhir b. Sheshet Ḥen
- 17) Isaac b. Solomon b. Menaḥem
- 18) Isaac b. Todros
- 19) Makhir ha-Levi b. Sheshet ha-Levi
- 20) Zeraḥiah b. Sheshet Ḥen
- 21) Ezra b. Sheshet
- 22) Shealtiel b. Isaac b. Moses Ḥen

- 23) Isaac b. Samuel Qaf
- 24) Abun b. Abraham
- 25) Judah ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai
- 26) Reuben b. Barzillai b. Shealtiel
- 27) Meshullam b. Isaac Ḥai
- 28) Sheshet b. Reuben
- 29) Judah b. Yeshua
- 30) Solomon b. Judah
- 31) Isaac b. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 32) Judah b. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 33) Joseph b. Benveniste b. Zabarah

In MQp, there is significant overlap in names (starred, with variations noted). In addition, five names appear there but not in MQd: **Samuel b. Shealtiel**, **Solomon b. Reuben**, **Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac** (in addition to Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi), and **Abba-Mari b. Isaac ha-Levi**.

**Letter 84 [103] – From Barcelona to Montpellier**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 2) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi (Escapet Melit/אשקפאט מלייט)
- 3) Isaac b. Joseph b. Ishai
- 4) Jacob b. Ḥasdai

In MQp, only Moses ha-Levi signs, his vernacular name apparently added by a later editor (Abba-Mari?)

**Letter 85 [104] – From Barcelona to Montpellier**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret
- 2) Isaac b. Joseph b. Ishai
- 3) Solomon b. Moses
- 4) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac
- 5) Jacob b. Ḥasdai

**Alternate list A (from mss. א and ג)**

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen             | 14) Abba-Mari b. Makhir               |
| 2) Jacob b. Ḥasdai                  | 15) Makhir b. Sheshet Ḥen             |
| 3) Shealtiel b. Saul                | 16) Isaac b. Solomon b. Menaḥem       |
| 4) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi   | 17) Isaac b. Todros                   |
| 5) Jacob b. Shealtiel               | 18) Makhir ha-Levi b. Sheshet ha-Levi |
| 6) Abraham b. Reuben                | 19) Zeraḥiah b. Sheshet Ḥen           |
| 7) Abba-Mari b. Isaac ha-Levi       | 20) Isaac b. Samuel Qaf               |
| 8) Samuel b. Joseph                 | 21) Abun b. Abraham                   |
| 9) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac          | 22) Meshullam b. Isaac                |
| 10) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi | 23) Sheshet b. Reuben                 |
| 11) Isaac b. Ḥasdai                 | 24) Judah ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai           |
| 12) Sheshet b. Shealtiel            | 25) Reuben b. Barzillai               |
| 13) Abraham b. Samuel Qaf           | 26) Judah b. Joshua                   |

- 27) Solomon b. Reuben
- 28) Solomon b. Judah
- 29) Isaac b. Solomon b. Adret

- 30) Judah b. Solomon Adret
- 31) Joseph b. Benveniste b. Zanada (variant: Zunbana)

**Alternate list B (from MQp)**

- 1) Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Adret
- 2) Samuel b. Shealtiel
- 3) Samuel b. Joseph
- 4) Isaac b. Ḥasdai
- 5) Makhir ha-Levi b. Sheshet
- 6) Abun b. Abraham
- 7) Judah ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai
- 8) Solomon b. Reuben
- 9) Judah b. Solomon Adret
- 10) Solomon b. Moses Ḥen
- 11) Abraham b. Reuben
- 12) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac
- 13) Sheshet b. Shealtiel

- 14) Zerahiah b. Sheshet Ḥen
- 15) Meshullam b. Isaac
- 16) Reuben b. Barzillai
- 17) Solomon b. Judah
- 18) Joseph b. Benveniste Ibn Zunanah
- 19) Jacob b. Ḥasdai
- 20) Abba-Mari b. Isaac ha-Levi
- 21) Samuel ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi
- 22) Abraham b. Samuel
- 23) Isaac b. Samuel Qaf
- 24) Sheshet b. Reuben
- 25) Judah b. Joshua
- 26) Isaac b. Solomon Ibn Adret

**Letter 93 [113] - from Capestang to the Montpellier traditionalists**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1) Nathan (ha-)Kohen b. Abraham (Kohen ha-Levi)            | 8) Moses b. Levi                       |
| 2) Samuel ha-Kohen b. Moses (ha-Kohen)                     | 9) Nathaniel b. Abraham b. Jacob Lunel |
| 3) Moses ha-Kohen b. Joseph (ha-Kohen)                     | 10) Isaac Kohen b. Moses (ha-)Kohen    |
| 4) Abraham ha-Kohen b. Samuel ha-Kohen                     | 11) David b. Joseph (or Moses) Farisol |
| 5) Shelemiah (or Solomon) b. Jacob b. Nathaniel (de) Lunel | 12) Shem-Tov b. Neḥemiah               |
| 6) Jacob b. Zadoq  | 13) Abraham b. Judah                   |
| 7) Abraham (ha-)Kohen b. Nathan (ha-Kohen)                 | 14) Moses b. Judah                     |
|  | 15) Benjamin b. Isaac                  |

All names appear in MQp, with the slight variations noted.

**Letter 101 [120(b)] – Toledo to Barcelona, conveyed to Abba-Mari by the Rashba**

- 1) Asher b. Yeḥiel
- 2) Solomon b. Joseph (Ibn Yasif)
- 3) Solomon b. Moses Abudarham
- 4) David (ha-)Kohen [b.] Moses (ha-Kohen)
- 5) David b. Jacob
- 6) Jacob b. Joseph
- 7) Meir b. Abraham (Abulafia)
- 8) Meir b. Joseph (Ibn Shushan)

All names appear in MQp with slight variations as noted, with Solomon b. Joseph Ibn Yasif and Jacob b. Joseph noted by the copyist after the list of names.

**MQd Letter \*122 [=MQey \*108; IL \*127] – Montpellier rationalists to Barcelona**

- 1) Isaac b. Abraham b. Jacob Avignon
  - 2) Judah b. Moses b. Isaac
  - 3) Solomon b. Moses b. Mordecai
  - 4) Solomon b. Joseph of Marseilles
  - 5) Saul b. Solomon
- “And many others” (MQd l. 109).

**MQd Letter \*123 [=MQey \*109; IL \*128] – from Barcelona to the Montpellier rationalists**

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1) Solomon b. Abraham b. Adret    | 7) Jacob b. Shealtiel                         |
| 2) Moses ha-Levi b. Isaac ha-Levi | 8) Reuben b. Barzillai b. Shealtiel           |
| 3) Isaac b. Todros                | 9) Shealtiel b. Samuel b. Shealtiel           |
| 4) Sheshet b. Shealtiel           | 10) Judah ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai ha-Levi b. Ḥasdai |
| 5) Isaac b. Judah Qaf             |   |
| 6) Jacob b. Ḥasdai                |   |
| 11)                               |   |

\*\*\*\*\* Beginning of letters from controversy of the 1210s \*\*\*\*\*

**MQey Letter \*104 [=IL \*123] – from Gerona or Barcelona?**

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) Levi b. Moses b. Todros b. Moses b. Todros | 9) Moses b. Qalonymos     |
| 2) David b. Joseph b. Qamai Zevi              | 10) Levi b. Judah         |
| 3) Moses b. Joseph                            | 11) Isaac b. Solomon      |
| 4) Abba-Mari b. David                         | 12) Isaac b. Isaac        |
| 5) Abraham b. Abba-Mari                       | 13) Judah b. Jacob        |
| 6) Joseph b. Abraham b. Jacob b. Ḥayyim       | 14) David b. Shalom Mebin |
| 7) Mordecai b. Matityah                       | 15) Alshrago b. Abba-Mari |
| 8) Ḥayyim b. Moses                            | 16) Makhir b. Abraham     |
|   | 17) Samuel b. Solomon     |

**MQey Letter \*105 [=IL \*124] – From Béziers**

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) David b. Benveniste | 10) Saul b. Asher        |
| 2) Meshullam b. Moses  | 11) Isaac b. Samuel      |
| 3) Simon b. Joseph     | 12) Abraham b. Abba-Mari |
| 4) Solomon b. Jacob    | 13) Ḥanani b. Joseph     |
| 5) Meshullam b. Joseph | 14) Nathan b. Solomon    |
| 6) Abba-Mari b. Joseph | 15) Solomon b. Nathan    |
| 7) Moses b. Jacob      | 16) Jonathan b. Asher    |
| 8) Matityahu b. Isaac  | 17) Jacob b. Joseph      |
| 9) Solomon b. Asher    |                          |

**MQey Letter \*106 [=IL \*125] – From Montpellier**

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Moses b. Judah        | 4) Joseph b. Solomon |
| 2) Reuben b. David       | 5) Solomon b. David  |
| 3) Isaac b. Joseph Mebin | 6) David b. Gershom  |

- 7) Joseph b. Isaac
- 8) Zerahiah b. Nathaniel
- 9) Moses b. Abraham
- 10) Isaac b. Matityahu
- 11) Joseph b. Jacob
- 12) Solomon b. Isaac b. Samuel
- 13) Abba-Mari b. Abraham
- 14) Shelemiah b. Nathaniel
- 15) Yequtiel ha-Kohen b. Aaron ha-Kohen
- 16) Moses b. Joseph
- 17) Isaac b. Abraham b. Ḥalafta
- 18) Moses b. Abraham b. Isaac

# APPENDIX 3 | RECONSTRUCTED TIMELINE OF *MINḤAT QENA'OT*

\* Indicates approximate or implied date.

MQp	MQd	Notes	Date
19	37	Abba-Mari reports that the letter arrived 29 Elul (no year). This must be 1304.	31 August [1304]
21	39	Mentions the date "בחדש אלול ס"ד לפרט" (=Elul 5064; Mahler: Elul 5064 begins 3 Aug. and ends 1 Sept.). Also mentions plan to discuss the matter of the ban over the upcoming holidays.	*August 1304
23	41/42	"ראש חג ס"ה לפרט" = א' תשרי תס"ה 5065 1 Tishrei 5065 is still 1304 on the Julian/Gregorian calendar.	1 September 1304
24	43	Letter mentions it is 2 months since the Rashba's letter arrived in Montpellier; unclear which of his letters this refers to.	?
38	57	Letter reports that several <i>nikbbadim</i> from Montpellier arrived in Perpignan after Sukkot (begins 15 <sup>th</sup> Tishrei). This would be 15 Sept. 1304. Sukkot would end on 22 Sept. (22 Tishrei).	*15-22 September 1304
60	79	Letter notes 8 months of silence between Montpellier and Barcelona (from Sukkot?).	* September 1304 – May 1305
61	80	The Rashba seems to allude to it being near Shavu'ot (begins 6 Sivan = 31 May in 1305)	* Late May – early June 1305
68	87	Reports events that occurred during "פרשת כי כל העדה כולם קדושים" (modern פרשת קרח Num. 16:3, usually read early summer) and שבת פרה. Shabbat Parah is one of the Four Parshiyot read on the Shabbat following Purim. Since 5065 is a leap year, 14 Adar II 5065 = 11 March 1305 (a Fri.), which makes Shabbat Parah 19 March 1305.	Mentions events from * 19 March 1305; and early summer 1305 (?)
71	90	Reports events that occurred during "פרשת ואלה הדברים אשר דבר משה" (modern פרשת דברים Deut 1:1, usually read mid-summer). A.S. Halkin says this is 9 Av = 31 July in 1305.	* 31 July 1305 (?)
Ps-80	99	Reports more events that occurred during "פרשת ואלה הדברים" of the year 5065 (= 1305; modern פרשת דברים Deut 1:1, usually read mid-summer).	* 31 July 1305 (?)
81(b)	102	Mentions the date 12 Kislev 5066 = 30 Nov. 1305.	30 November 1305
100	120(a)	Abba-Mari gives the date of the French Expulsion as 20 Av 5066 (= 2 August 1306) and the expulsion from Montpellier as occurring in מרחשוון בשבע לפרט (= Marḥeshvan 5067 = begins 10 Oct. 1306). Abba-Mari arrives in Perpignan 4 months later, on 1 Shevat (= 5 Jan. 1307).	2 August 1306; * Mid-October 1306; 5 January 1307



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